

**THE DEFENSE POW/MIA
ACCOUNTING AGENCY:
BRINGING OUR NATION'S HEROES HOME**

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND REFORM
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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C O N T E N T S

Hearing held on November 19, 2019	Page 1
WITNESSES	
Panel One	
Mark Noah, Chief Executive Officer, History Flight	
Oral statement	5
Vincent "B.J." Lawrence, Washington Office Executive Director, Veterans of Foreign Wars	
Oral statement	7
Jo Anne Shirley, Former Chair, National League of POW/MIA Families	
Oral statement	9
Panel Two	
Kelly McKeague, Director, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency	
Oral statement	20
<i>*Written opening statements, and the written statements for witnesses are available at the U.S. House Repository: https://docs.house.gov.</i>	

INDEX OF DOCUMENTS

The document listed below is available at: <https://docs.house.gov>.

* DPAA List of Active Partnerships from Mr. McKeague; submitted by Rep. Lynch.

**THE DEFENSE POW/MIA
ACCOUNTING AGENCY
BRINGING OUR NATION'S HEROES HOME**

Tuesday, November 19, 2019

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:05 p.m., in room 2203, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Stephen Lynch presiding.

Present: Representatives Lynch, Desaulnier, Kelly, Lawrence, Hice, Cloud, Green, and Higgins.

Mr. LYNCH. The committee will come to order. Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time.

This hearing is entitled “The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency: Bringing Our Nation’s Heroes Home,” and I will recognize myself for five minutes to give an opening statement.

Good afternoon, everyone. Today we will examine the progress of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, or the DPAA, in fulfilling its historic mission to provide the fullest possible accounting of our missing military personnel to their families and the Nation. This will mark the first congressional hearing to exclusively focus on the oversight of the DPAA since the agency’s creation in 2015.

At the outset, I would like to commend Ranking Member Jody Hice of Georgia for his leadership in supporting the POW/MIA identification and recovery efforts. On a bipartisan basis, Mr. Hice and I have been working to address the outstanding budgetary, operational, and management challenges facing the DPAA in order to maximize the agency’s ability to account for more than 82,000 missing servicemembers from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and other conflicts.

In September, Mr. Hice’s staff joined me on a congressional delegation to visit the DPAA headquarters and Skeletal Identification Laboratory located on Joint Base Pearl Harbor Hickam Airfield, to receive a mission update from Deputy Director Rear Admiral John Crites.

The streamlining of POW/MIA tracking and recovery efforts into a single agency, now the Defense Department POW/MIA Accounting Agency, followed extensive audits conducted by the Department of Defense Office of the Inspector General, the Government Accountability Office, and other Federal agencies. These reports high-

lighted critical mission gaps arising from the fragmentation of accounting operations across three entities, each reporting through separate chains of command.

In response to bipartisan concerns over the lack of a clearly defined mission, inconsistent policies, indeterminate resources and other obstacles facing the accounting community, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Congress mandated the creation of a single organization to lead a renewed effort to identify and recover the remains of missing American military personnel.

To the credit of the agency leadership, since 2015, the DPAA has taken meaningful steps toward refining its mission, unifying agency functions and personnel, and augmenting its accounting and recovery operations. With 218 recorded identifications in Fiscal Year 2019, DPAA reports that it exceeded the previous high annual total recorded by the agency or its predecessor organizations.

In order to further improve its mission, person identifications, DPAA is developing a strategy with an end goal of making at least 350 identifications annually by 2025. To this end, the agency plans to continue expanding its disinterment operations. In December of last year, the DPAA commenced a large-scale, multi-phased, disinterment project for 652 sets of remains of American servicemen buried as unknown soldiers at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, also known as the Punchbowl.

DPAA is also reinforcing its mission through diplomatic partnerships, with 46 host nations, and collaborating with veteran service organizations, nonprofit institutions, and other private sector entities.

Investigations and recovery team operations are ongoing in Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, South Korea, Guam, Palau, and other host nationsites. Moreover, the agency reports that its strategic public-private partnerships in field, investigatory, and excavation work, historical research analysis, and data collection have augmented recovery operations and helped to maximize scarce resources.

However, gaps in our POW/MIA accounting process and recovery efforts remain. The Office of the Inspector General reports that while DPAA allocates the majority of its operational budget to Vietnam War-related cases in Southeast Asia, the agency has not effectively communicated its rationale to accounting community stakeholders.

In certain cases, the prioritization of Southeast Asia has distracted DPAA from pursuing viable missions related to previous conflicts outside of the Pacific theater. The Office of Inspector General also found gaps in information sharing between the agency and the families of unaccounted-for service personnel. The communication of timely and accurate information to our POW/MIA families is at the heart of the responsibility of DPAA, and we must make every effort to improve this process.

We must also examine other personnel and operational challenges. For example, mandatory furloughs of Department of Defense civilian employees in previous years have suspended the search and recovery missions of DPAA's predecessor agencies and brought them to a virtual halt. Given that agency anthropologists, life support analysts, and other civilian workers were forced to take

monthly furlough days, they could not participate in operations that typically last over a month.

Delays are also problematic because the extreme conditions during the rainy seasons in places like Vietnam and Laos provide a limited window of opportunity to conduct recovery operations.

So in order to ensure the continuation of DPAA missions in the event of future budgetary uncertainty, earlier this month I introduced H.R. 4879, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Support Act, to exempt DPAA civilian employees who are deployed on recovery missions from furloughs.

Back in 2011, I led a bipartisan congressional delegation to Vietnam and the Philippines to examine search and recovery operations conducted by one of DPAA's predecessor agencies, JPAC, which is the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. I recall that our counterparts from the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons and the Philippine government repeatedly expressed their great admiration for the United States for its unwavering national commitment to leaving no servicemember behind. It is our collective determination as a nation to bring America's heroes home that guide this subcommittee's oversight in this area.

I would like to thank our witnesses for their willingness to appear and to help this committee with its work, and at this point I would like to yield to the ranking member from Georgia, Mr. Hice, for five minutes.

Mr. HICE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I just want to say thank you for calling this important hearing. You and your staff have been great to work with and we appreciate you working with us and our staff as well.

We all are here to owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our service men and women who maintained for us the freedoms and liberties that we enjoy here in this country, and in particular, those who have given the greatest sacrifice of all, and that is what brings us here.

I want to thank Dr. McKeague, or Director McKeague for being here, and all of you for your flexibility, due to scheduling and plane flights, to be able to make adjustments. We appreciate that a great deal and we welcome all of you here.

It is estimated that about 82,000 American servicemembers remain unaccounted for from past conflicts, and we need to do everything we can to bring them home. These families deserve so much from their fellow Americans, including providing closure for their loved ones having served this country.

The DPAA was formed through a consolidation of three organizations in 2015, to lead a national effort to account for missing servicemembers and to be a resource for families regarding their missing servicemembers' loss and recovery efforts. This is, frankly, one of those organizations we all hope and pray no one ever needs, but when it is needed we want it to function effectively and properly. And I know Chairman Lynch and myself and both sides want to see excellence in the DPAA in every way, both to honor our servicemembers and their families.

Currently, DPAA has a team of over 600 military and civilian employees conducting missions across 42 partner nations, working toward this goal, and we want to thank all of them for their dedica-

tion to the mission before them. In the past two years, DPAA has recovered and identified over 400 missing servicemembers. Under President Trump's leadership, the DPAA received 55 contains of U.S. servicemembers' remains from North Korea, and from that so far, 41 individuals have been identified. But obviously there is still a lot of work to day.

Today we have the honor of hearing from each of you. Jo Anne Shirley, former chair of the National League of POW/MIA Families, an organization dedicated to securing the release of all prisoners of war and the fullest possible accounting of those lost during the Vietnam War. Ms. Shirley not only led the National League for many years but her brother is one of those brave men who is still unaccounted for after his plane went down during the Vietnam War. Jo Anne, I want to thank you for your tireless efforts and for the multiple meetings that we have had personally. I want to thank you for that.

By Fiscal Year 2025, by working with organizations like the National League, the VFW, History Flight, and host nations, DPAA hopes to make 350 new identifications each year. I look forward to hearing from Dr. McKeague and each of you. Director McKeague, you may be a doctor. I know you are from Georgia Tech. It kind of rolls off. But I look forward to hearing from you and each of you on our panel today as we try to move toward that goal of 350 a year.

So this hearing will also be a chance for us to receive an update on the process the DPAA uses to recover and identify servicemembers as well as how they keep families apprised of the developments.

Additionally, we are looking forward to hearing from Mark Noah from History Flight. I look forward to hearing more about the important role that this nonprofit plays in the effort to bring our servicemembers home. And also Mr. Vincent "B.J." Lawrence of Veterans of Foreign Wars, or VFW.

Again, I want to thank each of you for being here today. Thank you for your dedication to this important task, not only to those whose lives were lost and to their families but to our Nation. We want to bring these people home.

And again, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your leadership in this, and I look forward to this hearing, and I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back. It is an honor to have this hearing, and I want to thank the witnesses for your willingness to come before the committee and help us with our work, our collective work.

The committee would like to welcome Mark Noah, the Chief Executive Officer of History Flight, Vincent "B.J." Lawrence, Washington Office Executive Director, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Jo Anne Shirley, Former Chair, National League of POW/MIA Families.

Would you all please rise and raise your right hand.

I will begin by swearing you in.

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

[Chorus of ayes.]

Mr. LYNCH. Let the record show that the witnesses have all answered in the affirmative. Thank you, and please be seated.

The microphones are sensitive so please speak directly into them. Without objection, your written statements will be made part of the record.

With that, Mr. Noah, you are now recognized to give an oral presentation of your testimony for five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MARK NOAH, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
HISTORY FLIGHT**

Mr. NOAH. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, it is my humble honor to be here as a representative of History Flight and to share my 15 years of volunteer experience in the mission to repatriate the missing in action servicemen from past conflicts. Thank you for this opportunity.

Noted author, David Colley, wrote in the prologue of his book, *Safely Rest*, "We have lost touch with the immense pain and suffering suffered by those in the war and the ripples of sorrow that still flow across the country from that devastating conflict. We know little of the men who gave their lives and nothing of the struggles of their families."

So these are very prescient words and in that context I would like to read a letter that I found in the National Archives about 15 years ago from a Mrs. Irene Rogers to General "Hap" Arnold, regarding her son was missing in a plane crash from World War II.

She said, "Dear General Arnold, we appreciate your kind words and sympathy and also the nice things you say about our son, Lieutenant M.G. Rogers. I would appreciate it so much if you could tell me what evidence you have that all the boys died that day. Every branch of the service has been very kind, his six-month gratuity pay is coming, and his insurance papers have been taken care of, but the thing I want to know is, where is my boy?"

Today, 81,864 families of America's missing service men and women still ask the same question: Where is my boy? Since 1952 to today, the search for America's 72,661 World War II missing, our 7,616 Korean War missing, our 1587 Vietnam War missing, and our 200 missing from the cold war and beyond, have been chronically underfunded.

Since 1952, the mortal remains of America's missing have been lost in the passage of time, discarded as trash, covered up by infrastructure and development, and accidentally disinterred in construction and agricultural cultivation of former battlefields. The first two Marines History Flight recovered on Tarawa, for example, were garishly displayed on a battlefield tour guide's front porch in April 2010.

In a forthright effort to help solve the issue of America's 81,864 missing service personnel, we founded History Flight, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization capable of deploying multiple transdisciplinary recovery teams to any part of the world to recover U.S. service personnel. For the last 15 years, we have merged multiple professional skill sets into a holistic, winning combination of search and recovery methodologies.

To date, History Flight has accomplished the three largest recoveries of American missing service personnel since the Korean War and has recovered a minimum number of individuals associated with American loss incidents, totally 309 from Tarawa and 16 from Europe, totaling 325 recoveries to date. History Flight has recovered a minimum number of individuals in Fiscal Year 2019 that equals 79.

History Flight has been a steadfast partner and supporter in the public-private partnership program with DPAA and the Department of Defense and our recoveries now constitute 20 percent of the DoD's annual identifications.

Last Friday, I was honored to be able to attend the funeral of PFC Joseph Livermore in Bakersfield, California. PFC Livermore was a Tarawa Marine that History Flight had recovered in March of this year, and he was recovered and identified in record time by the DPAA Central Identification Lab, who did an outstanding job to bring him to identified status in a very short period of time.

The outpouring of public support for PFC Livermore was inspiring, as more than 1,000 people lined the streets in Bakersfield to welcome him home. His primary next-of-kin told me, "Today is the best day of my life."

Today I was also fortunate to be able to attend the funeral of another Tarawa Marine that was recovered and identified as part of the Unknown Project, as well as in concert with work that History Flight had done with DPAA, Edwin Benson, of Boston, Massachusetts, at the Arlington National Cemetery.

The meaning of a deceased family member returning to America for a hero's welcome is of infinite value to his family and to the missing, as they regain their dignity and their identity. Our experience has shown that more than 50 percent of the missing men that we have recovered have had living brothers, sisters, and children at their funeral.

The recovery of America's missing servicemen is a vital endeavor for their families and for our country. What we are accomplishing in recovering the missing is putting a little bit of America back into America across this great country, from Bakersfield to Boston, and these two funerals that I just attended are a prime example of the success of the public-private partnership that has thrived under the new Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

History Flight operates offices in Virginia, Belgium, Tarawa, and the Philippines. History Flight employs transdisciplinary teams of forensic archaeologists, historians, genealogists, geophysical scientists, and combat wounded warriors who know what it means to shed blood for their country. Synthesizing our team's skills and life experiences have resulted in a business-like and passionate approach to the recovery of the mission where the objective is success and the team will stop at nothing to fulfill our Nation's promise of never leaving a fallen comrade behind.

To date, History Flight enjoys a 93 percent success rate at every search and recovery operation that we were involved in, a result that is unmatched in this milieu. To achieve that, History Flight members have raised and contributed more than 3.5 million private dollars and countless thousands of volunteer hours in an effort that has been not reimbursed by the Department of Defense.

Land of the free, home of the brave, yet 81,864 missing Americans are buried in unmarked graves.

Every government building, state capitol, post office flies the POW/MIA flag, yet our great country has yet to allocate resources equal to the need to recover our missing from America's wars of the 20th century. Resources remain the only major impediment to America being able to recover the men and women who lost their lives in the service of this country.

Despite the fact that History Flight recovered 325 missing individuals, including 79 in Fiscal Year 2019 alone, and has recovered 200 individuals for the cost of a single recovery in Southeast Asia, History Flight recently received a 66 percent funding cut for Fiscal Year 2020. How does the legislature, who are responsible for funding the recoveries of America's missing, expect the missing to be recovered if they don't adequately fund the operation?

And thank you very much for your time.

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Lawrence, you are now recognized for five minutes for an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF VINCENT "B.J." LAWRENCE, WASHINGTON OFFICE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

Mr. LAWRENCE. Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the subcommittee, on behalf of the men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and its auxiliary thank you for the opportunity to provide remarks regarding our partnership with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. I would also like to personally thank DPAA's director, Mr. Kelly McKeague, and the National League of POW/MIA Families CEO, Ann Mills-Griffiths, who are both with us today, for their partnerships and support of the VFW and our shared POW/MIA accounting mission.

Since 1929, the VFW has been intimately involved in the accounting mission. Our nation's ability to bring home our fallen heroes is a national commitment, but it is extremely limited by the lack of funding and the dwindling numbers of eyewitnesses who can provide information useful in identifying possible incident sites, among other factors. That is why the VFW has been partnering with DPAA and its predecessor organizations to work with foreign governments to help American researchers gain access to foreign military official archives and past battlefields.

Since 1991, the VFW is the only veteran service organization to return to Southeast Asia, Russia, and China, and has made it our goal to not rest until we achieve the fullest possible accounting of all missing American military and civilian personnel from all past wars.

Due to DPAA's efforts, 218 Americans were identified and accounted for in Fiscal Year 2018. However, government budgetary uncertainty prevented DPAA from identifying more fallen heroes. During a government shutdown, DPAA personnel are furloughed and forced to leave an incident site, which results in delays. The VFW thanks Chairman Lynch for introducing H.R. 4879, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Support Act, which would exempt DPAA employees who are conducting accounting missions from being furloughed in the event of a government shutdown. The

VFW urges Congress to consider and pass this important legislation as soon as possible.

The VFW urges Congress to also provide DPAA the necessary resources to expand recovery operations into North Korea and to support the remains recovery mission in the DPRK.

Locating, identifying, and recovering the remains of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the service of our country, from conflicts spanning nearly 80 years, is a difficult and hazardous mission, but it is one of the most important obligations that we have as a grateful nation. It is a promise to those serving in uniform today that no matter what, we will travel to the ends of the earth to return you home to your families. As a veteran who served in Korea, I am honored to have played a role in reuniting fallen veterans whose remains were left behind enemy lines in North Korea with their loved ones.

The VFW has played a vital role in advancing the POW/MIA missions. Last July, during the 120th VFW National Convention in Orlando, Florida, I asked Vietnam veterans to send in documents that might help the government of Vietnam to determine the locations of burial sites in order to find their estimated 300,000 missing soldiers and personal effects that might help bring comfort to their families.

Our VFW members and their families answered the call. On October 25, 2019, the VFW provided documents, artifacts, and personal effects to DPAA, which had the locations of battlefields and gravesites of Vietnamese soldiers. Returning these items to the Vietnamese government has helped improve the relationships with the United States. This display of diplomacy will not only help in our efforts to reach our true goal and promise to our families affected by the Vietnam War but help us gain access to future recovery sites.

With more than 82,000 U.S. servicemembers still unaccounted for globally, Congress must support full mission funding and personnel staffing for DPAA, as well as its supporting agencies such as the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory and the Military Service Casualty Offices. The fullest possible accounting mission remains a top priority for the VFW, and we will not rest until it is accomplished.

The VFW knows supporting this mission is something we can all agree on, and it is why we urge Congress to ensure this important mission can continue in perpetuity. Regardless of any lapse in government funding, it is insufferable that recovery missions or joint field activities which take an enormous amount of time, energy, and resources to plan, and must be conducted during certain times of the year, are suspended simply because Congress cannot do its job.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I personally know you and this committee agree with me when I say, as a nation we must always honor our solemn promise to never forget and to leave no one behind.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement and I am happy to answer any questions you or the members of your subcommittee may have.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Lawrence. Ms. Shirley, you are now recognized for a five-minute opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF JO ANNE SHIRLEY, FORMER CHAIR,
NATIONAL LEAGUE OF POW/MIA FAMILIES**

Ms. SHIRLEY. I am very grateful to Chairman Lynch and to Jody Hice for the opportunity to share my brother's history with you and our efforts to reach the fullest possible accounting.

My brother, Major Bobby Marvin Jones, United States Air Force flight surgeon, was two years older than me, and we had a very close relationship. He graduated from the University of Georgia, finished the Medical College of Georgia, and did his internship in Dallas, Texas, at Baylor Hospital.

The Vietnam War was raging. Bobby had a very low draft number, so he decided to join the Air Force for two years and then return home to do his medical residency. So in September 1972, he entered the Air Force and was assigned to Udorn, Thailand. He took care of the servicemen there at Udorn, and he actually reached out to help some of the local residents as well.

On November 28 of 1972, Bobby was flying Bacsu in an F4D, headed to Da Nang, South Vietnam. There is a large mountain, Bach Ma Mountain, as you approach to land. It appears that the F4D clipped the top of Bach Ma Mountain as they came in to land that day. When we learned that Bobby was missing in action I promised him that day that I would do everything I could to bring him home.

JPAC and DPAA have excavated the entire mountain slope and they found not a single human remain. I still work hard to get the fullest possible accounting of all of our missing servicemen, and I realize quickly that this issue is not just about Bobby, but it is about all. It is about the 1,587 still missing from Vietnam and our almost 82,000 missing from World War II to present day.

My parents learned about the National League of POW/MIA Families about a year later, and we decided to join, and we have never missed a meeting. I have served as the Georgia state coordinator for over 36 years, and I have worked diligently to keep my local Governor, my Georgia Governor, the Georgia State Veterans Department, our U.S. Senators and Representatives from Georgia up to date and knowledgeable about the challenges that we frequently face.

Each year at our annual meeting here in D.C., my husband and I come two days early. The first day when we get there we go up to see both Georgia Senators and leave them updated information. The second day we go to all 14 Georgia congressional offices in one day. I try to set up a meeting with each one of them before we come up here, but usually we wind up meeting with staff members only. But I leave them an update and I followup after our annual meeting so that they can never say they didn't know what was going on.

I served on the League's board of directors for 18 years and was chairman for 16 of those years, and I was blessed to have the support of my husband and my parents during that time. I was blessed to make four delegation trips to Southeast Asia, to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, where we met with high-ranking officials

in each country every time we went. We went out to about 12 or 14 of our ongoing site excavations. We actually stayed sometimes in base camps in very remote jungle locations, and interacted with JTF-FA and JPAC, who were working our sites at that time. I got to see first-hand what our excavation teams were doing to try to recover remains and airplane debris.

I have been to Hawaii several times and I visited CILHI and JPAC facilities each time, and I got to see how our specialists process remains that they have recovered, trying to extract samples of their DNA to match the DNA in the Armed Forces DNA Laboratory data base with DNA from the maternal side of the family for each man that is missing.

The accounting efforts face many challenges. No. 1 is funding this issue. That is a big deal. And I regret that DPAA, DIA, and AFDIL do not have enough personnel to reach the seemingly ever-increasing goals first set by Congress, and now we have to do that. When World War II and Korean War families finally got organized, and they had never been organized before the League, we saw a vast expansion in the accounting mission to include all wars, but without the resources that we need, the personnel and the budget, to meet the requirements resulting from the vast mission expansion.

The technology has had major changes over the years. We no longer use blood samples from a family member, but we can use a cheek swab or a hair sample to get a qualified family member whose DNA samples can be on file, and those have to be on the maternal side of the family. Soil acidity is so high in the key countries in Southeast Asia that we face limitations, very few years left to recover and try to identify the remains that we find. In a few years, our teams will recover bone fragments so decomposed that we no longer can obtain the DNA, or the remains will be so decomposed that we have nothing to recover.

I don't know any Congressman who has a loved one, or even a very special friend, who is missing, and many government officials have no idea what we are dealing with as we strive to reach the fullest possible accountings.

Realistically, we will never be able to recover and identify all of our missing, but many can still be brought home and honored for their service and the sacrifices that they made. I believe it is our responsibility, as individuals and as a Nation, to never ever leave them behind.

I decided not to stand for reelection to the League's board of directors several years ago. My husband was retiring and my mother was getting older. She is still very active and praying that we can get Bobby home. My mother will actually be 103 in three weeks.

My time and dedication to achieving the League's accounting objectives have not changed due to my no longer being on the board of directors. I still work every week and every day to try to help us reach the fullest possible accounting. And I have committed to all our servicemen to support them, both those that are missing and those that are serving active duty today, and I hope that you are too, that we can bring them all home and honor them for their service.

Mr. LYNCH. Ms. Shirley, thank you for your testimony, and I am sorry for your loss. You are a good sister. I will say that.

Ms. SHIRLEY. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. I do want to say that—so I live with a Gold Star sister as well. She is 94 years old. She lost her—this is Helen Shaughnessy, my wife's mom, and she lost her brother, Arnie, in his first parachute jump over the Rhine right at the end of—about a month before the end of the war, World War II, in Europe. So while I have not carried that burden I have certainly witnessed it.

So that experience—and also when I was an ironworker we had a guy in our crew, with Local four equipment operators, and a guy by the name of Jim Fitz, and he had lost his boy in 1969 in Vietnam. And I always remember while the rest of my crew would run off to, you know, the restaurant or the pub for lunch, Jim would sit in the cab of his pickup truck with the flag that they had given him, because his son was not recovered, and he would basically cry each day for lunch. That was his world.

Thankfully, in 1988, they recovered his son's remains, and I saw what a profound relief that was for his family and for Jim. That—those experiences have motivated me, in terms of being engaged in this process. And, you know, we are very lucky here, on this issue especially, that we have such great bipartisan support. Now this subcommittee will—while I have already done a couple of trips over, we will do another one specifically of Southeast Asia. We would like to get into Laos too, because while there has been a lot of attention on Vietnam and a lot of resources—not enough but a lot of resources on Vietnam—we would like to get into Laos because some of those families, you know, deserve our efforts as well.

I want to acknowledge the time and energy and passion that all three of you have poured into the mission to recover America's missing heroes and keep their legacies and stories alive. Not only have you helped bring closure and comfort to hundreds of families through the recovery and repatriation of their loved ones, you have also helped raise the awareness of this noble humanitarian cause.

Ms. Shirley, I would like to ask you to go back to the issue of—because when we went to the identification lab recently, we also heard the complaint that we did not have DNA samples from families, so that it would help the forensic pathologists identify the remains. You have to have a match. The Tarawa situation was a little different because you had a clavicle analysis, because we had x-rays of every single one of those boys. But can you talk about how perhaps families can be more engaged and how we might be able to, you know, enlist them to be more active and provide those DNA samples to help DPAA do their work as well?

Ms. SHIRLEY. I wish I had a good answer for that, because there are a lot of families who just choose not to do anything.

Mr. LYNCH. Yes.

Ms. SHIRLEY. The pilots on my brother's plane, I called them immediately when I found out that they wanted DNA from the maternal side of the family, and he was married and he had a baby and the baby's DNA would have been, you know, legitimate to put on file. And the wife told me that they had moved on with their lives, and this was just a few months, you know, past that, and not to

ever call them or contact them again. So it has been kind of reluctant, but I don't even know if our lab has their DNA on file.

I also shared our story at the home where my mother was staying first, and I shared our story and then I asked if anybody had a question. And this lady in the back raised her hand and she said, "My brother is missing from World War II." And I sat down with her afterwards and I said, "Is your DNA on file?" and she said, "No. I have moved on with my life." And she died six months later, and I went to her husband and I said, "Can I have her hairbrush?" and he said, "She didn't want to do that, so I have thrown everything away."

Mr. LYNCH. Wow.

Ms. SHIRLEY. So there are families who just have moved on with their lives. I honestly can't be in that same pew, but you can't force them to do it.

Mr. LYNCH. Yes.

Ms. SHIRLEY. We try to get the message out there. We try to spread, you know, the issue that we are trying to recover and bring them home. And my response now, I try to be nice about it but my response now is, "Okay, so you want them to sit in a box on a shelf in the lab somewhere, and we can't bring them home and honor them for their service and their sacrifice." And there are families that just kind of blow you away and they don't want to do it.

Mr. LYNCH. Yes.

Ms. SHIRLEY. So I think the more we get the message out there, the more likely we are to have somebody step forward.

And now we have got another generation that might be willing to do it. Like that baby that the pilot had, she is 47 years old. I have never met her. She has never come to a League meeting. She has never joined us or done anything. How do you force people to do it?

Mr. LYNCH. Well, maybe our successes, when people hear about Bakersfield and Boston—

Ms. SHIRLEY. Absolutely.

Mr. LYNCH [continuing]. and the Benson family, maybe that inspires people to say, "Hey, you know, this is meaningful and these young men deserve it."

Ms. SHIRLEY. And it can happen.

Mr. LYNCH. Right, and it is possible.

I have exceeded my time for questioning. I would like now to yield five minutes to Mr. Cloud for his questioning.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Chairman, and thanks again for holding this hearing. It is comforting that we can come together as a Congress on an issue as important as this and lay aside the differences and approach something that is extremely important to our Nation.

Thank you, Mr. Noah, and thank you, Mr. Lawrence, for your service to our country. Thank you especially that it continues beyond just wearing the uniform and all that you have done to serve with those who do wear the uniform but that your service has continued in what you are doing today. It is to be admired and respected, and I hope challenges us, all of us, in our service.

Ms. Shirley, of course your loss, we are sorry for that, and want to do our best to help you and other families like you. Could you tell us some of the challenges that families—I know you have

worked, not only your personal experience but you have also worked with a number of families. Could you share your experience and maybe some of the challenges that families run into in recovering the remains or trying to find out information about a member who has been lost?

Ms. SHIRLEY. You know, you never know which case or which, you know, one of our missing is going to be on the list. So we really just have to be very confident that DPAA is going to do everything they can, in all the countries, to get to those locations. You know, the real—you know, the challenge is to find where those locations are, because a lot of them, we have lost them but we don't know, you know, where to go and try to do those recoveries.

So I think, you know, families are just—I think the more we have—the more we can get involved, the better off we are, because we can spread the message to our Congressmen, to our President, to our Vice President, and I think that is a real challenge, to get more families. And now you look at—you are talking World War II. Is it going to be the children, the grandchildren, the great-grandchildren now that you want to be involved, that care? They didn't even know that loved one that is missing.

So I think we have a lot of challenges to get the message out, you know, of what we can do, what we are willing to do, what our capabilities are. And the more involved they are going to be, the better off we are.

Mr. CLOUD. What are, I guess, maybe a couple of tips that you would give a family?

Ms. SHIRLEY. Well, the first one would be DNA. Get your DNA on file if you are on the maternal side of the family. And I think being involved where you can spread that message is huge. Not—you know, if I share Bobby's message then, you know, it just shows that we do have information, there are things we can do, and it brings other people in as well, not just family members but it brings, you know, our veterans groups in. And I think the more we can get that message out, the better off we are. But you have got to consider, you know, those generations are now much lower. They are not the ones who actually knew that guy that is missing, and that is difficult.

Mr. CLOUD. Now we have a few individuals in our district, in the community where I live, who have looked to our office for help, not for family members but for their buddies, and we have run into even challenges trying to help them because of privacy issues and those kind of things. Do you have any thoughts on, first of all, if that is an issue that you have heard as well, how we could address that while respecting the privacy issues, speaking from the perspective of a family member? Do you have any guidance on that for us?

Ms. SHIRLEY. Well, privacy is kind of a challenge, I think, for some people, but people like me, I don't care about the privacy about my brother's case. I want the message out there, you know, that the more people that are involved—they can do fundraising, they can do public awareness, they can support those families. And, you know, the people that I have that support me and my mom in everything we do, it is so uplifting and so encouraging that that is huge.

So it is not big things—fundraising is great—but I think just the emotional support from people who don't have someone missing is, you know, critical.

Mr. CLOUD. Now we mentioned some of the infrastructure needs, I guess, or financial needs, or those kind of things, finances being one. Is lab capacity another issue, or do you understand, from your understanding that we have the lab capacity? When it comes to capacity, is it more of a lab issue or personnel issue?

Ms. SHIRLEY. You are probably asking the wrong person, but I would say both. You know, I think the more people we have that work these cases, that have the expertise to do, you know, their specific jobs, the better off we are going to be. So I think, you know, DPAA needs the personnel and the budget to be able to achieve, you know, the fullest possible accounting.

We have so many, you know, sets of remains that come in, and when you get remains like you get from Korea, and this might just be my opinion, but when they brought all those caskets in, that crazy guy over there, I can see him taking one set of remains and putting them in three or four different, you know, caskets. And it looks good, but when you get to the lab they have got to really do, you know, an examination on each one of those, you know, pieces of remains, and make sure that they are individual and they are not, you know, the same person.

So I think, you know, we have to have the expertise in the lab to be able to do those kinds of things, while we are still going out and bringing others, you know, in as well. So it is a real challenge. I think the lab, they do an amazing job, but I think the more people we have in there that have that expertise, the better off we are going to be.

Mr. CLOUD. I have exceeded my time, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields. Just on that point—and we will hear from Mr. McKeague a little later, but it is my understanding of the 51 sets of remains that we got from North Korea, the Chosin Reservoir area, there were 187 sets of remains within the 51 boxes, and that I believe there were dozens that were actually Chinese soldiers that had perished at that battle.

Ms. SHIRLEY. And we sent them back.

Mr. LYNCH. And we did. And we did.

Ms. SHIRLEY. Yes.

Mr. LYNCH. The chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Michigan, Mrs. Lawrence, for five minutes.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Noah, History Flight has been working on various projects in cooperation with DPAA, and you have described History Flight's relationship with DPAA as solid and professional. Can you explain how DPAA funding supports your work?

Mr. NOAH. The History Flight project has been funded over the years by the personal donations of some of the members, as well as selling airplane rides and using the revenue from the profit margin to fund the search for the missing. And History Flight also has a series of government partnership contracts with DPAA. So it is a combination of private donations and DPAA funding for our projects.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. And it is sufficient?

Mr. NOAH. Well, in the remarks that I made, at the end, I mentioned that we had recovered 325 individuals, including 79 individuals in Fiscal Year 2019, and for Fiscal Year 2020 we received a 66 percent cut in funding. So I have to say, looking at the macro picture of the missing from all the wars of the 20th century, they have all been chronically underfunded since the 1950's, and I think that in order to really put the best foot forward for the country, funding has to be adequate to the problem at hand.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. I appreciate that. If DPAA is able to continue its work in North Korea under a new record of an agreement, would History Flight want to be involved?

Mr. NOAH. I would have to say absolutely. History Flight has pioneered a transdisciplinary methodology to use remote sensing cartography, aerial photography, and archaeology combined to find missing graves that are unmarked. We have recovered over—well, we have recovered 309 individuals from Tarawa. Many of them were underneath buildings, underneath roads and houses. And we used the transdisciplinary methodology to find them. And we also used the concept of establishing an office in the project area and maintaining a 12-month-a-year presence. We had the continuity for the projects.

So if there was ever an opportunity to get back into North Korea, there are numerous graveyards in North Korea that were left behind by the U.N. when they pulled back after the Chosin Reservoir. There are also numerous graveyards of allied service personnel at the POW camps throughout North Korea. So I think the opportunity to get back into North Korea would be a very fruitful one, and we are well-suited to do that.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. That is good to know.

Mr. Lawrence, you have stated that the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and I quote, “continues to stand firm on its relationship and dedication with both the National League of POW/MIA Families and DPAA.” How would you describe your communications with DPAA leadership? Would you say it is responsive to your feedback?

Mr. LAWRENCE. I believe they are very responsive. We are in constant communication. We have some joint programs that we both monitor as it pertains to the POW/MIA mission. I spoke of one in the testimony that the VFW currently is involved with DPAA on, and that is asking our members, our over 1.7 million members worldwide, to consider giving us artifacts to the VFW or maps or battle memorabilia that they might have brought home from previous wars, and we turn them over to DPAA to process and to analyze.

We also have another program, and the chairman asked about it. We also have another program where we urge our members to provide those DNA samples, and we do that through our publications, our magazine, our Checkpoint newsletter, and on social media. So we actually pursue DNA—ask our families to submit DNA samples as well. That is another one of our programs.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Great. I want to say thank you. We hope that DPAA will continue to capitalize on the numerous benefits it gains from working with organizations like History Flight and the National League. If you think that more can be done to support the

network of NGO's and the accounting mission, I encourage you to reach out to members of the subcommittee, and I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlelady yields back. The gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Hice, is now recognized for five minutes.

Mr. HICE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Shirley, as past chairwoman of the National League, what were some of the more common problems, challenges that you faced working with DPAA, that you heard or that you saw that families were dealing with? What were some of the common challenges?

Ms. SHIRLEY. Honestly, I think most of our relationship with them has been very good. We reach out to them and then we get a response back very quickly. We have had great guys working, you know, out there in Hawaii, and I think we are blessed to have that kind of, you know, support.

Mr. HICE. Okay. So let's go there. Once a servicemember is found, then the family is notified, what kind of timeframe are we talking about from that point? How long is it before the family is able to make arrangements and have a proper interment, or whatever they want to do?

Ms. SHIRLEY. Well, I can't say I have been down that road so I am not sure, but I think we get them back on a pretty, you know, quick basis and honor them, you know, in whatever way the family—

Mr. HICE. Like what is a quick basis? I mean, what are we talking about? What kind of timeframe?

Ms. SHIRLEY. I am not absolutely sure about that. It just depends.

Mr. HICE. Do any of you have an idea?

Mr. LYNCH. Next panel.

Mr. HICE. Okay. The next panel will? Okay. So your experience has been very positive. You mentioned your brother. So I understand that DPAA, on at least a couple of times, have thought they had located your brother. So what kind of communication, in that kind of instance, took place with DPAA?

Ms. SHIRLEY. I think being involved and as active as I have been, and knowing everybody, you know, that works our cases in different aspects, I have gotten great response back from them. Not, you know, having to wait too long or sometimes I just call and ask questions and I get a response back pretty quick. So I am blessed to have, you know, the interaction that I have had up to this point.

Mr. HICE. Do you think that is characteristic of other families, you have a very close relationship or working relationship? Is that from what you hear? I mean, you work with a lot of families, talk to a lot of families. Is that the type of thing that you hear?

Ms. SHIRLEY. I truly believe it is. I think—

Mr. HICE. Excellent.

Ms. SHIRLEY [continuing]. DPAA does everything they can to get that, you know, message out to the families.

Mr. HICE. Okay. So we have—let's just say we have a family out here who is trying to locate a servicemember or a loved one and they are just trying to get started in the process. It has got to be a pretty intimidating thing to even begin the process. They have probably just kind of have a sense of overwhelming challenges.

Where do you tell them to go? What happens for that family? How do they need to get started? What can they expect?

Ms. SHIRLEY. I think they just need to contact DPAA and ask the questions, you know, that are on their mind, and get what—if they don't get the responses back that they want then they need to ask those questions again. I don't think sitting back and just saying, "Well, I am just going to wait here and hope that, you know, miracles happen." I think the more the families, you know, come on board and, you know, ask the questions they need answers to, they are very quick to respond to those.

Mr. HICE. Chairman Lynch introduced—he mentioned it a little earlier before I had to step out, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Support Act. Are you familiar with that, somewhat?

Ms. SHIRLEY. Um—

Mr. HICE. How would—I guess my question is, can you talk about how that would impact DPAA?

Ms. SHIRLEY. I am going to let somebody else answer that one—

Mr. HICE. Okay.

Ms. SHIRLEY [continuing]. because I am not totally up to date on that one.

Mr. HICE. Okay. All right, well, listen, I again want to thank you. I want to thank all of our panelists for the incredible work you do. All of us here feel that what you do is not only worthwhile, it is necessary. And we are just grateful for each of you, the role that you are doing to make this function as efficiently, and I am thrilled that the experience that you have had with DPAA has been so positive and that that seems to be across the board. That is just tremendously encouraging to hear, so thank you very much.

I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back. The gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Green, is recognized for five minutes.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member Hice. I thank the witnesses for being here. I am very thankful for what you guys do and what DPAA does to bring our sons and daughters home, my brothers and sisters, I might add, in arms, who have made the ultimate sacrifice. And I ask the members of the audience and anybody watching on television, if you thought your nation would abandon you on the battlefield, you probably wouldn't aggressively expose yourself to enemy fire or put yourselves more violently in harm's way.

You guys are the ones who enforce the motto of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines, and that is that we will leave no man or woman behind, and the unit that I served in, committed two Chinooks fully loaded with Army Rangers to find one Navy SEAL's body, and we lost several men on that battle. My friends died trying to find his body.

As we now transition into what is the Nation's first multigenerational war, what was my generation's war is now becoming my son's war, as Second Lieutenant Green just returned from Syria and Iraq and Kuwait. Knowing that you have committed wholly to your mission, I just want to thank you and say that my wife and I are—we find some reassurance in knowing that you are there doing your mission.

My questions are mostly about the process itself. None of you guys are from DPAA, though, right? That is in the next panel? Okay. I am really not going to say much else then for now, other than to just thank you for all that you do. And I agree with Chairman Lynch—you are a great sister, and I can only hope that if that would have been me or my son, we will all fight as equally hard. I am sure we will. But again, thank you. Thank you for your service to the Nation and your service to these men and women who have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

I yield.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, for five minutes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the panelists for appearing before us today. It is a very important topic, bipartisan, of course. We support full funding and what is required to retrieve all American service men and service women who have been lost. I believe that is a unanimous consensus.

I do have a question that perhaps, Ms. Shirley, you may be the one that could give me some insight in this, all of us. Do you have any idea how many remains have been recovered, that have, in some nation state, in some laboratory that we have no DNA on file?

Ms. SHIRLEY. I don't know how many they have there in the lab. I know that they just keep hoping that they are going to get somebody's DNA, that they can, you know, run through the data base and bring them back. But I do know that they do have some.

Mr. HIGGINS. These recovered remains exist, that are awaiting DNA comparison, for a DNA hit, right?

Ms. SHIRLEY. Yes.

Mr. HIGGINS. And are you aware of, or can you shed any light, is there an equivalent agency at, say, the United Nations level, that works with DPAA, that communicates with other nation states that perhaps have similar endeavors, be they private or nonprofits or government organizations?

Ms. SHIRLEY. I can't answer that. I am sure—

Mr. HIGGINS. Perhaps the next panelist would be able to.

Any one of you could perhaps respond to this query. In law enforcement, we watched something change over the last 15 years. So as the digital age became manifest, especially including cold cases and missing persons, the older detectives had a way of doing things that required a great deal of assets and resources in order to research and try and get tips or leads, or look into cold cases and missing persons.

As the new generation of investigators that have IT skills came into service, they started having ideas about using the internet to search for missing persons and to put clues out there for cold cases, and it has worked, from sea to shining sea. Now you have cold cases and missing person cases that have lingered for, in some cases, decades, that have been solved by a bright, young detective that brought a new methodology to a detective division at departments everywhere.

Has that happened within the DPAA, or are you aware of it, where we can do more with less? I mean, we are a nation that intends to fully fund this very, very important core principal endeavor.

or, but at the same time we want to use every efficiency possible. So can any of you shed a light on anything that has been done? Mr. Noah?

Mr. NOAH. There are a large number of individual personnel deceased files and personal records related to missing servicemen from World War II and Korea that are available online, and many people have done a prodigious amount of research to collect data that will start the process for field activity and for searching for missing people. But it really is just the beginning. The beginning of finding and solving a 75-or 60-or 50-year-old case starts with a prodigious amount of research and culminates in placement of correct excavation decision, where you might be able to find that.

Mr. HIGGINS. Understood. That would be, in the interest of time, just to clarify, you are talking about field research. That would be once there was some basis for an investigation into a particular site.

Mr. NOAH. Correct.

Mr. HIGGINS. But comparing the expense of initiating an investigation to that level in the field, now versus 15 years ago, it would seem to me that more could be done with less. In other words, we have digital efficiencies that reach worldwide now that we did not have 15 years ago.

Mr. NOAH. Correct, and DPAA has already started utilizing some of those opportunities by doing research related to the unknown soldiers that are already buried in American military cemeteries, to determine the possibilities of who they may be, to fund excavation decisions to disinter them and then to identify them.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you all for your commitment, and I thank the chairman and the ranking member for holding this hearing today. Thank you, sir.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you. The gentleman yields. At this point I would just like to say thank you, Mr. Noah, Mr. Lawrence, Ms. Shirley, for your testimony here today and helping the committee with its work, and putting a personal face on this effort, and also inspiring us by your own efforts that you are doing, and reaffirming the commitment that we have as a country to make sure that we identify, we recover, and we return every one of these service men and women that we have lost.

At this point I would declare that the witnesses are dismissed, with the thanks of the committee.

The other witnesses in the next panel, would you please come forward. As the panels are switching out, please be aware that there may be additional written questions for you for the record, and I would ask that you answer them promptly and completely. And again, we want to thank Panel One for their willingness to testify and help this committee with its work. Thank you.

We are going to take a five-minute recess just to reset the panel. Thank you.

[Recess.]

Mr. LYNCH. The committee will now reconvene. At this time I would like to welcome our next witness. Today we are joined by Kelly McKeague, Director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. Mr. McKeague, would you please rise and raise your right hand.

I will begin by swearing you in.

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Let the record reflect that the gentleman has answered in the affirmative. And with that I would like to welcome you to offer a five-minute recitation of your upcoming testimony.

STATEMENT OF KELLY McKEAGUE, DIRECTOR, DEFENSE POW/MIA ACCOUNTING AGENCY

Mr. McKEAGUE. Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Hice, other distinguished members of the subcommittee, it is a privilege to appear before you today and to update you on the efforts of the Department of Defense to achieve the fullest possible accounting of missing Americans from designated past conflicts.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has worked collaboratively to execute and advance this noble mission with other partner agencies within the DoD, with the Department of State and its embassies, with 46 partner nations, and with non-Federal entities, three of whom you had represented on the first panel.

These efforts are global in scope with investigations marked by painstaking research, challenging recoveries in inhospitable environments, and remarkable scientific enterprise. While the numbers of our Nation's unaccounted for and the inherent task to find answers on them is daunting, DPAA and its partners are not deterred.

I have structured my written statement highlighting the four lines of effort within DPAA's five-year strategic plan—research and analysis, accounting, communications, and business operations. Focus on achieving an agile, innovative, collaborative, and digital agency capable of an increased pace and scope to account for our missing, our lines of effort will build upon the agency's significant successes since its establishment in 2015.

Among those successes are, as many of you pointed out, we have consistently increased the number of missing persons accounted for each year since our 2015 reorganization, with the last Fiscal Year culminating in 218 accounted for. We established and maintained a single centralized data base and case management system by leveraging the latest in information technology. Our efforts in Vietnam and Laos have been marked by an increased pace and scope, as both countries have been more amenable to initiatives that better achieve mutually shared objectives.

While we were not able to arrange field operations with the North Korean army, as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, 41 servicemembers have so far been accounted for from those 55 boxes repatriated last year, and many more are expected in the months ahead.

We are increasingly utilizing public-private partnerships, as you heard from Mark Noah, to increase capacity and capabilities that to date have resulted in 82 partner field missions at an estimated cost avoidance of \$32.1 million.

Since almost 20 percent of the missing who are estimated to be recoverable are buried as unknowns in U.S.-controlled cemeteries here at home or abroad, DoD continues to successfully execute a

rigorous program to disinter these remains for the purpose of identification.

And last, through our increased engagement with families and veteran service organizations, we continue to strengthen transparency and trust as we provide more information about their loved ones and DPAA's activities on their behalf.

While DPAA has become the cohesive agency the Department of Defense and this Congress envisioned, we still face significant challenges, but DPAA will not waver in its commitment to bring our missing heroes, their families, their comrades in arms, and the American people the answers they deserve. It is a moral obligation to seek the fullest possible accounting of those who lost their lives in service and sacrifice to this great nation. They must never be forgotten, and Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I thank you for not doing so, as you support the sacred mission.

I respectfully submit my written statement for the record and welcome any questions you may have.

Mr. LYNCH. I thank the gentleman. I yield five minutes to myself for questioning.

First of all, thank you very much, Mr. McKeague, for your willingness to come before the committee and for all the work that you are doing to help return our heroes to their families and to their communities.

During the recent codel, when I had a chance to get out to Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, I spoke with your deputy director, Rear Admiral John Crites, and it was a great opportunity to see the lab in action. At that point they had recovered 40 sets of remains from Tarawa, and so I got an opportunity, and our staff got an opportunity to observe that whole identification process. It was really emotional, but just spiritually, you know, it felt right that we were doing that work and that those young men would be returned to their families and to their home communities.

I know that for Fiscal Year 2019, Congress appropriated about \$15 million additional for DPAA's operations, and I am just concerned. I know there is a shortage of funding. Where would additional resources be best allocated? Is it the investigation portion? Is it the actually recovery operations? Is it the identification portion where we have remains that are recovered but not identified?

Where do you think the additional resources—because we have—look, I have to give my Republican colleagues great credit for their willingness to work on this as partners. So there is no—I cannot sense any opposition. It is more inertia, that we have got to move this thing and create a priority for it, and then fight like heck when we get it on the floor, or by amendment, you know, friendly amendments, Democrats and Republicans fighting together for this purpose. So this is something we agree upon. So I don't see what the hold-up is here, you know, and I think that—well, I can't speak for the Senate but I think they would take a favorable view of this as well.

So could you tell us where do you think the allocation of resources would be best received and produce the—you know, the biggest benefit for the expenditure?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Mr. Chairman, first of all I would like to thank the Congress. In 2018, you all provided us \$15 million extra in

funding. This last fiscal year, you provided \$30 million extra to DPAA. In both cases, all of that money was put toward operations in the scientific enterprise.

If we were to receive additional funding, there are three priorities we would place it against. First would be expanding the scientific staff to be able to do more identifications and forensic analysis. The second would be a digitization project, again, as we try to, as a member talked about earlier, what are we doing to improving finding missing persons. And the third area would be expanding public-private partnerships, which you heard from Mark Noah.

So if we were to receive extra funding, that funding would go toward capabilities and capacity purely from an operational standpoint, to allow us to increase our pace and scope.

Mr. LYNCH. Okay. I do know that in one of your earlier requests—and I am not sure if it was last year or the year before—actually, it was for the 2020 budget, DPAA asked for a \$17 million increase in the budget for North Korea. And I understand, you know, that was open, you know, that theater was open for a while and we were getting some remains. I am not sure what the status is right now. Could you explain, you know, the urgency and the focus on North Korea, which has been a closed shop since we had a falling out over some of their nuclear proliferation issues some years ago.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir. So we operated successfully in North Korea for 10 years, from 1996 to 2005, but we have not been back since to conduct joint field operations. As part of the Singapore Summit, the President was able to get from Chairman Kim a commitment to not only repatriate remains that they hold but also to resume field operations.

Twenty million of the 30 million that Congress gave us was directed toward operations in North Korea. We were unable, obviously, to execute that. In 2019, the Department of Defense gave us an additional \$17 million for the express purposes that should we get an arrangement with North Korea that we could utilize that money to conduct those operations. Unfortunately, our entreaties to the North Korean army have been met with silence. Our last contact with them was in March. But we continue to be open to the opportunity to sit down with them, to negotiate field operations in 2020.

Mr. LYNCH. Very good. I have exceeded my time so I would like to recognize the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Hice, for five minutes.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Director McKeague, for being here.

It is my understanding that DPAA has developed a case management system that helps list the names of those missing in action and so forth, so that families can research and kind of keep updated. When did that go live?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. That went live in 2015.

Mr. HICE. Okay.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Actually, we started developing it in 2015. It utilizes the latest in information technology. It is cloud-based computing. We intend to look at machine learning. We intend to look at artificial intelligence as we expand it. We had our initial oper-

ating capability with that system in 2017, and declared final operational capability this past April.

Mr. HICE. Okay. So it is still relatively new.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. HICE. How often is it updated?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. It is a continual process.

Mr. HICE. So it is constantly being updated.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir. As our users begin to become more familiar with it, and it is across the entire enterprise, and it is just not the historians and researchers. It is also the scientists. So it runs the full gamut in terms of providing that common operating picture when it comes to the missing.

Mr. HICE. So do family members or those who sign up for this, or however they get on with it, do they receive automatic updates, or do they have to go online to check it on a regular basis? How does that work?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. So there is a public portal piece that a family member has access to, all of their cases, all of their profiles, all loaded in there. They can readily access that with ease. The case management system is more an internal agency as well as a Department of Defense collaborative tool.

Mr. HICE. So does that mean—do they receive an email that there is an update on their case, or do they have to keep looking?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. They have to keep looking.

Mr. HICE. Oh they have to keep—Okay.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. HICE. So once you have identified an individual, what safeguards do you have to make sure that it is the servicemember of a particular family?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Before our scientists make an identification they utilize multiple lines of evidence, and it is not just one line of evidence that secures that definitive, it is this soldier, sailor, airman, or Marine. Utilizing those multiple lines of effort, the medical examiner assigned to DPAA will not make that forensic determination until he is satisfied that lines of evidence have been—sufficient lines of evidence have been met.

Mr. HICE. But you don't always have those sufficient lines. So how do you make a determination? I mean, what you just described certainly would be an ideal scenario, where you are able to verify and reverify and have different angles from which verification is positive. But what if you don't have all those different lines?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. We need three before we can make an identification.

Mr. HICE. All right, so if you don't have three out of X number—

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Seven.

Mr. HICE [continuing]. if you don't have three out of seven then that person is never identified.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. HICE. Okay. All right. So once a servicemember is identified, and this is the question I asked Ms. Shirley earlier, what kind of timeframe from that point until when the family is able to receive their loved one and have a proper interment, or whatever they want to do?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. As soon as we make an identification report we turn it over to the Service Casualty Office of the servicemember's service. They will then contact the family. They will share with them the identification report, and at that time they will make arrangements for the interment, within weeks.

Mr. HICE. Okay. So we are not talking months and months.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. No, sir.

Mr. HICE. So once an individual is identified, we are talking weeks—

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. HICE [continuing]. before the family—wow, that is amazing.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Now the interment, in a case like Arlington, is challenging—

Mr. HICE. Sure.

Mr. MCKEAGUE [continuing]. because of the delay—

Mr. HICE. But at that point it is in the family's hands and it is out of yours, and the family has their servicemember home, and making the arrangements from there is a different—

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. HICE. I have got you. Okay, let me go back to—Chairman Lynch introduced the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Support Act. I am just curious, your thoughts and discussions of how this would impact DPAA.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. It impacts DPAA from the standpoint that as an entity within the Department of Defense, we do not—our mission does not fit the risk to public safety as well as a national security imperative. And as such, there have been instances in the past when there has been a lapse in appropriations that we have had to shut down the operation and only leave a skeleton crew behind for ensuring that equipment and materials are protected.

Right now, the bill is not consistent with department policy as to us qualifying for that exemption, and it would be something that we would collectively have to weigh, is the risk of these civilians conducting this mission and not getting paid, how is that weighed against is it a threat to national security or public safety?

Mr. HICE. Okay. Well, maybe that is something we can work together on.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. HICE. But again, I want to thank you for the incredible job you do. Thank you for being here.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Thank you, sir.

Mr. HICE. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. One quick question. Admiral Crites had mentioned that when some families are contacted about the identification of a loved one they actually fly out to Hickam, at Pearl Harbor, to accompany the body, the remains, back into the country.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. LYNCH. Do we pay for that, or DPAA, do we provide funding to help those families come out?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. The respective service funds a military escort.

Mr. LYNCH. Wow.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Under the rules, it has to be a uniformed member. So we benefit from the standpoint that there are family members, second and third generation, serving in uniform today, whose

uncle, great-uncle, grandfather, in fact, they have the privilege to bring home.

Mr. LYNCH. Okay.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. So the military department will fund those individuals.

Mr. LYNCH. That is great. Okay.

The chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Cloud.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Chairman. Okay, so we have—and thank you for being here.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Certainly.

Mr. CLOUD. I really appreciate, again, the opportunity for us to work on this topic together.

So we have about 82,045—am I—so that would be 43,000, roughly, who we deem are unrecoverable, and then almost 39,000 we think we could have the potential to find. Do we know, of those two, where they are? Like what distinguishes—why do we think they are unrecoverable versus recoverable? What are you using to make that—to distinguish that? And then, do we know where, roughly, they are, what field of service?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. A majority of those individuals that are nonrecoverable are deep water, at-sea losses. These are ships, aircraft that are in depths that are technologically impossible to get.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. There is also a category of nonrecoverables that we, through our investigations and our excavations, have hit a brick wall, evidenced by Bobby Jones.

Mr. CLOUD. Right.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Jo Anne's brother, we have been to that site eight times. Now we don't classify him as nonrecoverable yet. It is still in a deferred status. But we have categorization—four categorizations that we will place an individual in, depending upon where we are in the investigative as well as the recovery phase. The majority of the nonrecoverables are the deep water, at-sea losses.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. Like 70 percent?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. I would say probably 80.

Mr. CLOUD. Eighty?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Eighty, 85 percent.

Mr. CLOUD. And of those we think we could find, do we know what field of service they are in? How many are in North Korea, or—

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Oh, absolutely. Yes, sir.

Mr. CLOUD. Could you break that down, roughly?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Sure. If you will allow me to pull out my handy-dandy cheat sheet. So if you were to look at our missing by conflict, we estimate that the recovered individuals, for World War II we estimate close to 30,500 are recoverable; for the Korean War, 7,200; for the Vietnam War, close to 1,100; and 126—actually, none from the cold war.

Mr. CLOUD. Right. Okay. So basically—and the process would be, generally speaking, you get a tip on a location, through research, history, then we work through excavation recovery, remains, and then it goes to the lab, and then we work with the family to try to make the contact. How many remains do we have that we can't

find who they are connected with because of lack of DNA, or is it more the fact that we—are there remains we have, I should say, that we don't know who to connect them with?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. It is both. It is both remains that have not yielded DNA, and these are because they have either degraded environmentally or they have been degraded by being treated with formaldehyde powder when they were first recovered and being able to un-identify them back in the 1940's and 1950's. So it is that piece as well. But then we also DNA that is not yielding because we don't have a family reference sample.

Mr. CLOUD. I guess I was trying to figure out is more along those lines. How many could we identify if we had the DNA information from the family?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. So if you look at the Vietnam War, we have 88 percent family reference samples on file. For the Korean War it is 92 percent. For World War II, we only have 12 percent of the missing have a DNA family reference sample. And the reason for that is because it wasn't until 2010, when Congress directed the department to proactively search for, recover, and identify missing from World War II. Prior to that it was a reactive mission.

And so, Mr. Cloud, it is a very linear process, and you hit the nail on the head. In order for us to be able to excavate, we first must do the research and analysis up front, to take an area this size and reduce it down to this size. Then we send field investigators to narrow it down even further. And if we are higher than probable theory that we know where, we have an idea where the excavation might be, we will send a recovery team in there.

So we are playing catch-up with World War II, just given the late start. Until we build out the research and analysis and the historical archival information, we won't be sending teams all over the world as effectively as we do with Vietnam.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. I have no more questions.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Green, for five minutes.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Chairman Lynch. I really appreciate it.

Just to kind of go over your history a little bit, you are a two-star general, as I understand, retired?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. GREEN. How many years of service did you give in the Air Force?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Thirty-four.

Mr. GREEN. Thirty-four years of service. So these are your brothers and sisters too.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. GREEN. You were raised a patriot, as I understand. You have a family member serving as well. Thank you for that.

It is an honor to have you here, sir, and I think the country is lucky to have you serving where you are. Most of the questions that I had planned to ask have been asked. Just one quick reminder on the remains. I think it was 55 that were given to us from North Korea. Is that right?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Fifty-five boxes.

Mr. GREEN. Fifty-five boxes, and there were 31 that you have identified so far?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Forty-one.

Mr. GREEN. Forty-one.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. GREEN. Okay.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. But here is an interesting fact. There are 250 independent DNA sequences in those boxes.

Mr. GREEN. Wow.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Eighty of them are of Asian origin—

Mr. GREEN. Okay.

Mr. MCKEAGUE [continuing]. either South Korean or Chinese. But of the 170 of Western origin, only 20 have been previously identified and accounted for.

Mr. GREEN. Okay.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. It shocked us that we are now talking potentially up to 150 U.S. or U.N.-sending state individuals that could be identified from these boxes.

Mr. GREEN. Wow. That is fantastic. Okay.

I think you heard a little bit of my story earlier when we were talking. I served for 24 years myself and I have family members now serving. So I asked the question, you know, we are also Congress and we have a responsibility to taxpayers and all that stuff, and you are in a unique mission that we want to do all we can for, and I support the chairman's bill. But at the same time I want to ask, you know, some tough questions, so bear with me just a second.

As I understand it, your budget last year was—well, the budget you asked for this year was \$146 million. Is that right?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. GREEN. And that is, I think, 14 or so million less than—we put in the line entry about \$14 million less than that, right?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir. You enacted 160.

Mr. GREEN. Okay. If you divide that by 218, which is what you guys got last year, that is about \$600,000 per person. With the 38,000 that we have got left to find, if it is \$600,000 per, we are talking about close to \$25 billion. My question to you is, how can we be more efficient and do this, and find some efficiencies in doing this?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir. We have looked at this for many years. So if you look back to the predecessor organizations, we didn't do it very well, and I think that was part of the impetus why, as you mentioned, GAO, by the IG, and ultimately Secretary Hagel recognizing that we needed to look at a better way to do that. And thus you have the merged agency, single-purpose, sole mandate to fulfill this Nation's commitment.

Over the three-years that we have had DPAA in place, since the stand-up of our final operating capability, we have utilized the authorities that Congress gave us, particularly with establishing public-private partnerships. I mentioned that cost avoidance of \$32 million, that we are very proud of. And we are able to do that by agencies such as Mark Noah's. But we work with universities, both domestic and international. So we are looking for ways to expand capability and capacity, because we know we won't get additional manpower.

We are also looking at technological advances. Our laboratory just put forward a stable isotope analysis capability. This allows us to differentiate comingled remains by the geographic origin of where they came from, as well as who they might belong to. That will save us tremendously in not having to do the expensive, time-consuming step of DNA analysis, if we can segregate up front.

And I mentioned to you that we are also utilizing our case management system. We are looking for efficiencies there on how we can figure out to bring in new technologies, new innovations such as machine learning and artificial intelligence to help us do more on the up-front, and, more importantly, on the back end, when it comes to identification.

Mr. GREEN. It just makes it much easier for us to write a bigger check knowing that you are looking for efficiencies in the system. And if we could get the cost per down, you know, that makes it easier for us to write more. Nobody wants to find these remains any more than I do.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. GREEN. And like I said, I have lost friends in combat, so I know. But I just want to make sure we are doing it as efficiently as possible.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. GREEN. And thank you for all the hard work that you are doing.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. We are also looking at our annual operations plan. We have a quarterly assessment that looks at, okay, how did we do that particular mission in Laos? Did we do it to the best of our ability?

We are also leveraging, to their credit, the Vietnamese have doubled the number of unilateral teams they are putting in the field.

Mr. GREEN. That is fantastic.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. And they will go from four this year to six, and next year they will field eight unilateral excavation teams that have no U.S. personnel on it, that we have helped train, going out to areas that are hard to get to, that are inaccessible, and they are doing this on their own volition.

Mr. GREEN. Well, thank you again for your amazing service and your willingness to do this.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields.

So, Mr. McKeague—and again, thank you for your service—I wanted to just touch on that issue as well. Obviously, when the Koreans did the recovery, they gave us 51 boxes and 250 sets of remains, the precision with which they operate, or, you know, the care and exactitude that they operate with is far less than what you do when you do these operations. So, you know, there is some quality issues, I guess, in terms of recovering our personnel.

Are you worried about the same situation with Vietnam? We actually met with some of their recovery teams when we were there back a few years ago, and I understand when we were doing recovery operations, if we recovered Vietnamese boys we returned them to their home country and try to help them with that. But do you worry about not being on the ground with these Vietnam recovery teams during their operations?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. No, sir. We have ultimate confidence in their abilities, and, more importantly, their passion. When we first started out we would create Vietnamese recovery teams. These normally had five to six American subject matter experts, rounded out by Vietnamese officials and part of their military. Those VRTs have evolved to these unilateral excavation teams, and it is because they, themselves, have committed to the capability building, they have committed to the training that we have provided them, and, more importantly, they have delivered with great results.

I would like to clarify that the remains that came from North Korea, we know that they lack forensic capabilities, and so these remains in these 55 boxes were very disjointed, they were very degraded, but all the bones—there were 500 bones in those boxes, very comingled, very degraded. But every single one of them yielded DNA, because they had been stored for many years in an environment that was conducive to that.

On the other hand, their South Korean counterparts probably rival us in terms of capability, capacity, and talent. We helped stand up their capability with them in 2001, and they have developed it to quite the impressive enterprise. And you might recall that as part of the North Korean and South Korean agreement, they actually had been working in the DMZ, on Arrowhead Ridge, since April 1st.

I met with my South Korean counterparts last month. They have found 600 bones from that effort. And so we are very confident. We have a strong relationship with our South Korean counterparts. We are just hoping that, again, North Korea will be receptive to us, at some point, resuming field operations with them.

Mr. LYNCH. Okay. That is great. That is encouraging.

Can I ask you about the USS Oklahoma? When we were there recently I was told that while earlier on, maybe it was because of a lack of technology, the remains of those sailors were considered just buried at sea. And now I understand that there has been some recovery and identification operations going on with respect to the USS Oklahoma, which was sunk at Pearl Harbor.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir. So when the ship was righted about a year and a half later, the Navy went through and recovered all the remains. Back in the 1940's, they identified what they could. A majority of them could not be identified, and so they were buried as unknowns at the cemetery in Honolulu, and we were able to disinter them, working with the Navy, in 2015. There were 388 sailors and Marines in those 60 caskets. They were highly comingled. One casket alone had 95 DNA sequences.

Since 2015, we have diligently, at our Omaha, Nebraska, laboratory, we have diligently begun the process of forensically analyzing those remains, along with the Armed Forces DNA Laboratory, and today we have identified 240 of those 388. And that is in about four years. We have another 89 that we believe will yield—that yielded DNA. We believe that those 89 will also be identified here in the next few months. And so we are very pleased with the progress that we have made, but that has come about because of the collaboration with the Department of the Navy, as well as the Armed Forces DNA Laboratory.

Mr. LYNCH. That is great. I would like to ask you about the role of private partnerships. So who are our partners? Are these universities? Are they research labs? Just for the public's interest, who are some of your private partners now that actually help you with these location, identification, and recovery efforts?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. So we have 57 active partnerships today. We have another 34 that are evolving. They range anywhere from helping us with research and analysis—I will give you an example.

Mr. LYNCH. Can you name some of them?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Sure. University of Wisconsin. We have a hub-and-spoke arrangement with the University of Wisconsin to help us with research for World War II.

Mr. LYNCH. Is that the Madison campus, or—

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Madison. Yes, sir. We are working with Texas Tech, which probably has the largest non-Federal holdings of Vietnam War history. We are working with them. You met Mark Noah on History Flight. We work with Scripps Oceanographic Institute out of California. We work with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Massachusetts on helping us with underwater recoveries. We just added East Carolina University Underwater Excavation in Palau that was very successful.

We also work with international partners. The University of Papua New Guinea is one that we are very excited about because their contacts throughout the Nation State is such that they are able to get into villages, remote villages. They have the relationships. Another one that we are working with, that we are very excited about, is, there is an organization called American Veterans Archaeological Recovery, AVAR. These are veterans, combat veterans, who through this opportunity to work an excavationsite, they found is very therapeutic for them. So they helped us with a B-24 recovery in the UK. That was very successful.

There is another organization similar to that, Project Dagger, Task Force Dagger, that has helped us with an underwater recovery, along with Scripps, in the South Pacific.

Mr. LYNCH. That is great. Very helpful.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. And for the record, Mr. Chairman, I would be more than happy to submit—

Mr. LYNCH. Yes, that would be helpful if you would submit that for the record—

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. LYNCH [continuing]. without objection.

Mr. LYNCH. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Cloud.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you again, Chairman. I appreciate you answering some of Mr. Green's questions. It is comforting to know that as we are, you know, prioritizing funds that you are looking at the efficiencies of it too and how what you are doing can better inform. So that is helpful.

And I was going to ask about Laos as well, so it is good to know that is going well.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. I would offer that the Lao also have been more cooperative over the last few years. So I give you three examples where we have asked them, presented initiatives to them. They have allowed us to increase our personnel that are there for the

four joint field activities from 53 to 65. That allows us to do more. They have approved us adding a fifth operational period, and then they just added two individuals, Lao officials, to augment what the defense intelligence agency, STONY BEACH Program, is doing on field investigations and finding witnesses.

These are just three things that the Lao government have been cooperative and amenable to as we have presented it to them.

Mr. CLOUD. Awesome. Thank you. I had asked this in the previous panel and you are probably the one who may have more information on it. Are there things from a legal or regulatory standpoint that we could do, any roadblocks that you are running into that we could help? You know, we talked about funding, I know, already, but is there anything that you are running into when it comes to dealing with families or dealing with—

Mr. MCKEAGUE. No, sir.

Mr. CLOUD [continuing]. servicemembers? Okay.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. You all gave us that private partner authority, which has been a godsend. You have given us the opportunity to engage in grants and cooperative agreements, which, again, allows us to work with universities that work in that venue of grants and cooperatives. And last year we came to you and asked you for the authority to accept gives, and you gave us that authority.

So we assess the authorities that we have, and I can tell you that there are none that we lack today.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. And then we talked about all the different steps in this process, from exploration and research to recovery and identification, and I believe when you were answering the chairman's questions you kind of discussed that the staff is probably the bottleneck of it. My understanding, in looking through some of the materials, was we probably have the lab infrastructure capacity to identify up to maybe 600 a year. Is that the thinking? We just don't have the staff, or is that not correct?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Not today. The capacity and capability we have today allows us to identify and account for 200, 250 a year.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. Is that—I guess I am trying to distinguish between lab infrastructure and personnel.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. They are both alike.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. Those resources are kind of matched at this point.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. And if you had more funding for lab personnel you would be able to find it? Is there a workflow issue with that?

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Not at all.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. These young men and women are talented in their own right and live for the opportunity to serve DPAA and its mission. Mr. Lynch, you met many of them out there and you see that they are bright-eyed, they are uber-intelligent, and they are just dedicated, when we ask them to do what we ask them to do, not only in the laboratory but also in the field, where they are there for 45 days, in inhospitable environments, and working back-breaking labor to find missing Americans.

Mr. CLOUD. And for clarity I wasn't questioning those who are—I was questioning whether, you know, people are coming out of universities with the degrees needed to do—

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir. They want—

Mr. CLOUD. So you would be able to find the talent pool.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. They look at DPAA as really the brass ring in the anthropology and archaeology world, just because of the very nature of its work.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. CLOUD. I appreciate it.

Mr. LYNCH. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Green, for five minutes.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It kind of dawned on me, and I am a former infantry guy so maybe I am not the fastest guy at the table, but it kind of dawned on me, a lot of what you are doing is really foreign affairs work at the U.S. Government.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. GREEN. I mean, you are out there working with our former enemies, in a way, to—you know, to find our remains. You are finding their remains and you are returning them with dignity. I can only imagine that returning those Chinese to China was, you know, a huge plus for us, from a foreign affairs and foreign relations standpoint. And I just want to say it is sort of—as I have listened to you talk, it sort of opened my eyes to even further possibilities with what you are doing. So I want to again thank you.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Sir, if I could comment.

Mr. GREEN. Yes, please do.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. That is a very insightful observation. Our mission actually predated normalization of relations with Vietnam by 10 years.

Mr. GREEN. Wow.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. We were actually working in Vietnam on investigations and recoveries seven years before the U.S. Embassy planted a flag. Vietnam, at the time, recognized, through the work of the National League of Families and other activities, that this was important to the United States.

And so you are absolutely right. It is a tool of diplomacy, it is a tool of engagement, and because it is humanitarian, even today we are the only military-to-military engagement allowed by DoD with Russia.

Mr. GREEN. Wow.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. And we engage with the Chinese. And again, both countries, despite the strain and stress and tension with the overarching bilateral relationship, recognizes this as a humanitarian endeavor.

Mr. GREEN. Well, that certainly makes it a lot easier. I mean, I just—I am excited to hear that, and I think that is a huge plus, sort of a side effect. I mean, your goal, of course, is to go and find our boys and girls who have given their lives for their country, but I think it is icing on the cake that what you are doing is really beneficial to our foreign policy.

Mr. MCKEAGUE. Yes, sir.

Mr. GREEN. And, Chairman Lynch, I just want to ask you, the next time you make one of these codels, I would love to know, because I would love to go out in the field and just share our appreciation with the men and women who are doing this mission. So thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Green, you are in. You are in. We would be proud to have you, and obviously this will be a joint Democratic and Republican codel, and you are certainly welcome to attend, as are other members of the committee too, Mr. Cloud, as well.

I do want to close by saying this. So on our previous visit to Vietnam on this issue we had a closing luncheon with a bunch of the communist generals in Saigon. Actually, it was in Hanoi. It was Ho Chi Minh City.

And at the closing ceremony the commanding general, communist general, sort of gave a toast to our delegation at the end, and he said that the people of Vietnam have great respect for the people of the United States, but it is probably not for the reasons that you think. He said it is not because of your, you know, being a major—the major military power. He said it is not because of your—you know, you are the major economic power.

He said it is because of efforts by the DPAA, and at that time, JPAC. He said, “The fact that you are here 60-some-odd years later, for the sole purpose of bringing the bodies of your sons and daughters home for a dignified burial,” he said that is why the people of Vietnam respect the United States so much.

So thank you for your work. You will be hearing from us. We definitely will be trying to get out to Laos and maybe some of the live recovery operations going on in Vietnam. We will probably try to swing around to some of the other operations in the South Pacific as well.

So I would like to thank our witness for his testimony today. Without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witness—all the witnesses, first panel and second—to the chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for response. And I ask our witnesses to please respond as promptly as you are able.

This hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 5 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

