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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legion demands JPAC reforms

Fake arrival ceremonies are deceptive, not symbolic, says national commander.

WASHINGTON (Oct. 11, 2013) -- The American Legion is demanding immediate reform with the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) after NBC News reported that "arrival ceremonies" honoring the recovery of POW/MIA servicemembers' remains were staged.

JPAC, a joint task force within the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), conducts recovery operations to identify all U.S. military personnel and designated civilian personnel missing and unaccounted for from our nation's wars. According to NBC News, the Pentagon admitted that false POW/MIA arrival ceremonies have occurred for seven years at the Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii where honor guards have carried flag-draped coffins off military aircraft. The Pentagon defended the staged arrival ceremonies in its statement to NBC News: "Part of the ceremony involves symbolically transferring the recovered remains from an aircraft to a vehicle for follow-on transportation to the lab. It is important to note that recovered remains ceremoniously transferred from the aircraft to the (bus) have been in the lab undergoing forensic analysis to determine identity. When remains first arrive in Hawaii, JPAC cannot confirm if the remains are those of an American servicemember."

NBC News also reported that the staged ceremonies are known by military and civilian staff at Harbor-Hickam base as "The Big Lie."

For families awaiting the return of their missing loved ones, The American Legion believes JPAC's actions are deceptive and must change.

"Symbolic honors are one thing, but deception is quite another," American Legion National Commander Daniel Dellinger said. "The so-called 'Big Lie' does not honor our war dead. Instead, it misleads and insults the living. It is especially egregious during a most sensitive and vulnerable time for families. Though I am certain these deceptions were not meant to be cruel, this revelation shines a bad light on JPAC, whose mission The American Legion strongly supports, and the Pentagon. Honesty, from the beginning, would have served the Pentagon, JPAC and, most importantly, the families of our fallen heroes much more honorably.

"I sincerely believe, based on The American Legion's experiences and interactions, that the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command is, by and large, dedicated to its mission and provides a valuable service to the military family community. Professionalism, compassion, sympathy and honesty need to be at the top of the list as JPAC reforms are considered and made into policy. The mission of identifying and repatriating our missing is a sacred obligation."

JPAC was the subject of media reports last spring that characterized its command as "dysfunctional," a Government Accountability Office report called the Pentagon's efforts to recover servicemembers remains "inefficient" and recommend an overhaul of JPAC.

-30-

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