DISPATCH Daily

"For God & Country"

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The POW/MIA snipe hunt

The Clinton administration may believe the government of Vietnam is doing all it can to account for missing Americans, but don't tell that to Carl Ford or Dino Carluccio. They say that claim simply is not true.

In a three-hour long POW/MIA update conducted yesterday, Ford and Carluccio, along with Army Brig. Gen. James L. Campbell, outlined the past, present and immediate future of missing persons accountability.

"I am angry and frustrated at what our government has been telling you and me in the last few years," said Ford, a former deputy secretary of Defense for international security affairs. "What they have done is truly shameful. At best, they have misled the American people. At worst, they have created conditions where we may lose forever any chance we have for families to find out the fate of loved ones missing in southeast Asia," he said.

Ford thanked the 50 or so Legionnaires present at the meeting for the Legion's tireless commitment to seeing "the POW/MIA question" through to a resolution, even as other veterans' organizations seem to be buying what Ford claims is the Clinton administration's bunk.

While admitting that normalization of relations with Vietnam can have a positive impact in myriad ways, Ford was most displeased with the administration's "the end justifies the means" attitude. "The administration changed the definition of 'cooperation' to make concessions for Vietnam. The Vietnamese made no changes whatsoever," Ford said.

Only 89 sets of American remains have been returned during the Bill Clinton years, according to Ford, compared to 100 during the George Bush tenure and 172 under Ronald Reagan. Increased pressure on the Clinton administration, followed by pressure from them on the Vietnamese, is the only way to get results, he said.

Carluccio, for the most part, agreed with Ford's assessment. As legislative assistant to POW/MIA advocate Sen. Robert C. Smith, R-N.H., Carluccio must

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QUOTE OF THE DAY:

"The Clinton administration has no strategy to get information from Vietnam on missing Americans."

— Dino L. Carluccio, legislative assistant to Sen. Robert Smith (R-N.H.)

LDS president a certified 'Good Guy'

In his long career with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), Gordon B. Hinckley has won kudos and many awards for his leadership and community service. Yesterday, Hinckley picked up a special award from a Legion organization whose members are known for their own leadership skills and service to others.

Hinckley, LDS president, was presented with the Past Department Commander's 1996 "Good Guy Award" at a luncheon yesterday at the Red Lion Inn. A native of Salt Lake City, Hinckley, has traveled the world over and dedicated more temples than any other leader in the history of the Mormon church.

Pres. Hinckley

"I have received many honors over the years—but not for being a good guy," Hinckley joked after being presented the award by PNC John P. "Jake" Comer, president of the Past Department Commander's Club. "I wish my mother and sixth-grade teacher were here to see this."

Hinckley, who assumed the helm of the 16-million-member Mormon Church in March 1995, said the Legion's Patriotic Memorial Service Sunday was a poignant reminder of the high costs Americans have paid in preserving freedom.

Hinckley said Americans must always continue to strive for peace, citing the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, calling on his people to "beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks."

"Thank you so very much for what you have done and what you continue to do for this country," Hinckley said in expressing his appreciation for the honor. "I am very moved by this award and I thank you very much for it." ❑

U.S. still facing threats near and far

■ Regional instability still threaten American interests

In an era of reinventing government and federal streamlining, fat will – and should be – cut from bloated staffs and budgets. Cuts should not go too deep in the intelligence community, however, because of its increasing role in our national security.

That was the main message delivered by John Gannon, deputy director for intelligence at the Central Intelligence Agency, as he spoke to Legionnaires at the joint meeting of the National Security and Foreign Relations Commissions last weekend.

"Our country faces numerous challenges in this still complex and dangerous world. You know well that despite your contribution to the breakup of the Soviet Union there remain profound threats to our country, our interests, and our way of life," Gannon says.

Since no single challenge has risen to fill the vacuum created by the demise of the Soviet empire, Gannon says it is uncertainty that now predominates.

"Uncertainty characterizes the international arena because instead of the one, slow-moving target we had during the Cold War we now have numerous, fast-moving, unpredictable targets that will threaten our freedom if left unchecked," Gannon said.

Before taking Legionnaires through a virtual laundry list of threats to the United States, Gannon emphasized his agency's role in the Post-Cold War era. "The role of intelligence in American national security is critical precisely because the role of America in the world is vital. U.S. global leadership depends on four things: a strong military, a strong economy, effective diplomacy, and a superior intelligence community," he says.

Here's what Gannon said about some primary threats to U.S. national interests:

• **Russia.** Simultaneously experiencing three revolutions – in its economy, its politics and its military – is a task unprecedented in world history. The CIA remains optimistic, however, following the recent elections and some positive signs in the Russian economy. Spending for the armed forces have diminished drastically over the last five years, with some experts claiming only a quarter of their land force divisions are combat ready. Russia retains, however, the second most powerful nuclear arsenal in the world, and poor security could lead to the proliferation of these weapons among hostile nations.

• **China.** Also undergoing profound changes, China clearly intends to reclaim its historic position of dominance in East Asia not just because of its size and population, but also through its growing economic, diplomatic and military power. Not given to rush anything, the Chinese can wait out almost any temporary crisis. Economic reforms have lead to greater wealth for China, while that money has been funneled into modernizing its military.

Acquisition of Hong Kong in July 1997 will put even more gold in the government coffers. That's money that could be spent against the Taiwanese, who face daily threat of invasion from the mainland, Communist Chinese.

• **Iran.** What scarce resources this fun-

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VA envisions streamlined care network

The campaign to change how VA delivers health-care to veterans is at the heart of the Legion-authored GI Bill of Health. The restructuring process already is well under way, according to a director of one VA's 22 Veterans Integrated Systems Network (VISN).

Dr. Terry Batliner, a dentist who heads Rocky Mountain Network #19, told members of the VA&R Commission VA is working to streamline their care networks, which many veterans fear means VA's economy measures are a prelude to closing hospitals and clinics. Not so, said Batliner.

"We see this as a mission to save VA," Batliner said. "I'm not here to dismantle the VA, I will quit before I see that happening," he vowed.

Instead, the VISN concept uses a management approach that builds in control and accountability on the regional level, and carries out VA's mission by attracting input from health-care providers, clinical and surgical staff, volunteers, support staff and veterans' service organizations such as The American Legion. "We really are trying to have a collaborative process as much as possible," said Batliner.

> **"We see this as a mission to save VA. I'm not here to dismantle the VA, I will quit before I see that happening,"**
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> **Dr. Terry Batliner**

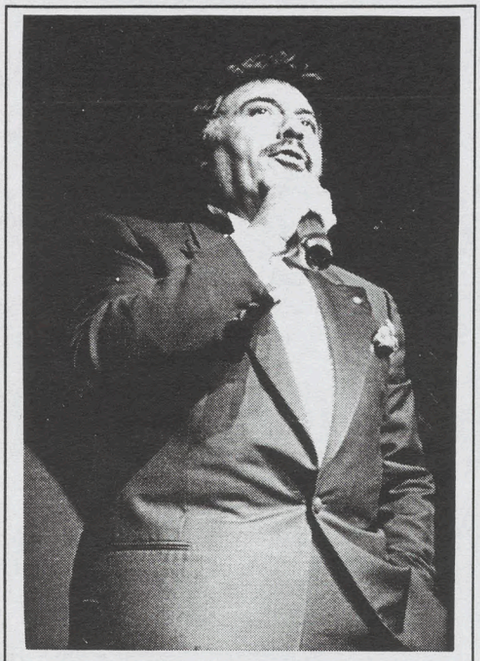
VA continues to emphasize ambulatory care at outpatient clinics, and move away from unnecessary, more costly hospital stays. VA is attempting to move outpatient care facilities closer to veterans by shifting resources within the system to deliver services to veterans.

For example, record searches revealed a concentration of veterans in the Billings, Mont. area served only by one small clinic inadequate to the demand for services. That situation prompted VA to shift staff from the Miles City, Mont., VAMC, the system's smallest medical center, to Billings. Other initiatives will improve outreach efforts to veterans by moving more mental health and substance abuse programs to clinics. This also means contracting for services with private hospitals and health-care facilities, and more in-home care which reflect health-care trends in the private sector.

"We have to become more efficient, and we think we can," Batliner said. "We know we can't maintain the status quo; we need to change things," he said.

VA&R Commission Chairman Chet Stellar applauded Batliner's pledge to improve communication with The American Legion on Veterans Health Administration policies, offering a friendly reminder to the VISN director about the importance of keeping in touch.

"If you keep veterans service organization informed and tell them why these changes are necessary and what's going on, you'll get less flak," Stellar said. ❑



ORLANDO THIS YEAR: Singer Tony Orlando will entertain at this morning's gala convention opening, and tonight at the National Commander's Banquet.

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damental Islamic nation has continue to be diverted to the military, particularly for procurement of weapons of mass destruction. Tehran supports terrorism and political violence, opposes the Middle East peace process, and abuses human rights.

• **Iraq.** Saddam Hussein's defeat in the Gulf War may have weakened his military, but they remain the most powerful military force in the region with some 2,000 tanks and 300 combat aircraft. Currently, only internal insurgencies feel the power of this force, but that may not continue, as evidenced by Iraq's latest crisis-provoking excursion into the Kurdish "no-fly zone" and occupation of Irbil and Sulaymanlya. Through deception and clandestine operations, Baghdad's government continues its attempts at developing weapons of mass destruction.

• **Libya.** Qadaffi, like Saddam Hussein, has a strong hold on power and depends on his security forces to buttress his regime. Still, internal Islamic militants could overthrow him, leaving them with the alleged underground chemical weapons plant still under construction. ❑

Voss 'quarterbacks' rally

Legionnaires are inclined to be social, to say the least. Any reason to get to gather is reason enough for bluecap members to share some time to gab together and share common ground.

Virginia Legionnaire John Voss, a member of Braxton-Perkins Post 25, Newport News, Va., formed a new, loose association this year with other Legionnaires in Post 25 outside the Old Dominion. Any significance to the number 25, John?

"No, we just got to B.S.n' one night and thought it'd be a good idea to have a rally at the convention of all Post 25s," said Voss, director of the War Museum in nearby Hampton, Va. Legionnaires love a story – here's John's:

While visiting Lake Placid, Fla., earlier this year, Voss stopped by Post 25 and thought the coincidence was kind of neat. After some discussion with local Legionnaire Ed Dionne, Voss returned home and set to work.

"We didn't even know how many we had when we started," Voss said of the Post 25 population. First, he contacted National Headquarters seeking the location of every Post 25 in the organization. Next, he wrote a letter proposing a rendezvous during this year's gathering in Salt Lake City for a cookout, site to be determined. He sent the letter out to every domestic Department, and followed up by mailing out flyers.

Somewhat to his surprise, Voss scored a few hits and commitments from fellow Legionnaires anxious to attend the gathering. Enter Cherrie Martin, then commander of Post 71 here in Salt Lake City, who generously offered the Post home facilities for Voss's gathering.

The turnout was good for a barbecue at Post 71 held Friday, Aug. 30 – Henry Jennings of Holyoke, Mass., made it, as did William Mack and Leo Sotak from New Jersey; along came Tim Wattenberg and Carl J. Sundstrom from Moorecraft, Wyo.; and Wayne Stringer from Ft. Scott, Kan., also decided to tag along.

Legionnaires from two other Post 25 Departments – Massachusetts and Philippines – expressed interest but couldn't make it this year. Another Legionnaire sent along a few bucks for expenses. Ed Dionne had to beg off, too, but there's always next year. No matter, said John Voss.

"This year I did it alone. I'll have a lot of good help next year in Orlando," said Voss. ❑

FODPAL slates leadership for '96-97

A World War II Army veteran is the president of the Foreign and Outlying Departments of The American Legion (FODPAL).

Ernesto P. Golez, National Executive Committeeman from the Philippines, was elected to FODPAL's high office last weekend for the 1996-97 term. Golez and other FODPAL officers were installed by Past National Commander Erle Cocke Jr.

Other officers electedinclude: Andreas R. Bordonada, Puerto Rico (first vice president); Douglas C. Hagan, France (second vice president); Jimmie Foster, Alaska (third vice president); Alfred Platt, China Post 1 (judge advocate); and Leroy Pulawa, Hawaii (historian).

Also, Sally Bennett, Mexico (chaplain); Francisco Santiago, Puerto Rico (sergeant-at-arms); Robert J. Conrad, Hawaii (secretary); the Rev. John E. Hayes, Mexico (treasurer); and Arnie Matanky, France (public relations director).

Other officials include: Miguel Gonzalez, the Philippines; Mike Beavers, France (assistant judge advocates); Julio Roble, the Philippines, and Royce Wheeler, Mexico (assistant historians); Frank Baubista, the Philippines, and Lloyd Little, Alaska (assistant sergeant-at-arms); Frank C. Bottilgiero, France, was appointed breakfast chairman.

Among the Legion luminaries at the head table were past National Commanders Michael J. Kogutek, Erle Cocke Jr., John Geiger, John P. "Jake" Comer, William M. Detweiler and Bruce Thiesen.

National Commander Daniel A. Ludwig presented FODPAL's International Amity to Antonio Ty, Department commander of the Philippines. ❑

Titus flies the friendly skies

■ National Security chief enjoys a wild ride in Utah

Allen L. Titus took a ride on the wild side and earned his wings the old-fashioned way during his visit to Hill Air Force Base near Ogden last Friday.

Titus, chairman of the Legion's National Security Commission, was in the backseat of an F-16 fighter plane for an orientation flight, punching through the skies of northern Utah. "I've been on a lot of roller coasters, but they seem like trolley car rides compared to the F-16," said Titus. "It was thrilling beyond belief."

Before going airborne, Titus went through a pre-flight briefing, suited up in a gravity-suit (designed to offset the effects of gravity-forces), and was shown how to eject from the plane in case of an emergency. Piloting the plane was Air Force Maj. Mike Brill of the 466th Fighter Squadron, a Legion member of Post 129, Utah. The two went through a series of maneuvers and a refueling exercise. Titus compared his gut-punching experience to scenes from movies such as *Top Gun.*

"I've been on a lot of roller coasters, but they seem like trolley car rides compared to the F-16."

"Before the flight, Major Brill told me he had never had to eject," Titus recalled. "I told him, 'Let's not break your record today with me in the plane.'" During their flight, Titus saw first-hand the devastation wrought by forest fires in northern Utah.

While Titus was in-flight, other members of the commission and other guests toured the training facilities at the 388th Fighter Wing at Hill AFB and visited the Hill Aerospace Museum. ❑

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keep pressure on the executive branch from the Congress.

"Vietnam and Laos have not provided full disclosure. Vietnam is getting everything it wants from the United States, so there is no incentive to provide additional information," Carluccio said. "I'm convinced we could get more answers if we had more support from the top (Clinton)."

Most of Carluccio's hour-long presentation hammered home one single fact: None of those American prisoners of war held by the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese in northern Laos have ever been accounted for.

"Accounted for" is a standard term used in this debate. To be classified in this manner, an American soldier listed as missing must be returned alive, remains must be returned, or convincing evidence as to why the first two items are not possible must be presented. Campbell called this last item, "The Third Criterion."

Despite problems, Carluccio believes all POW/MIA questions will be answered to the American people's satisfaction—someday. For that to occur, however, the United States must play hardball. "Twenty-three years ago we heard words like 'inconceivable,' 'absurd' and 'ridiculous' from top government officials when we were told there had been a full accounting. Who's saying these things now?" Carluccio asked. In a scathing indictment of the executive branch, he "came to the reluctant conclusion that evidence has been shrugged aside by this administration because it doesn't fit the pretty picture they want to present."

Rising to the challenge, Campbell updated the crowd on activities of Joint Task Force Full Accounting—the target of some of Carluccio's criticism.

"We perform a complex, noble, humanitarian mission. And I'm proud of the difficult work done by those in the military working to answer these critical questions about missing service personnel," Campbell said.

The 180 men and women comprising JTFFA work in the United States, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam to account for POW/MIAs. Campbell claims that since his organization formed on Jan. 23, 1992, they have conducted 2,150 investigations, 332 excavations, 72 joint field activities, and 13,296 family notifications.

Meanwhile, 370 sets of remains have been repatriated, 121 of which have been positively identified as U.S. service personnel. On a sad note, 582 personnel have been classified under the Third Criterion, "simply because we have exhausted all our leads," Campbell said.

Past National Commander Robert S. Turner, chairman of the Legion's POW/MIA Committee, assured all speakers that while Legionnaires are frustrated and angry that a full accounting is not a likely prospect, all their efforts are appreciated. ❑

'VAONLINE' speeds information pipeline

Interactive customer service is the promise behind VAONLINE, the Department of Veterans Affairs internet connection.

VAONLINE features statistics on veterans and the full range of VA programs and benefits, public affairs news releases, and gateways to other services. In addition, a full range of general benefit information is at their fingertips on the VA's Home Page, at **(http://www.va.gov)**, then click on "Facilities," followed by "VA Facilities – Where to Go for Help." Next, click on VAONLINE.

Through the VA Home Page, veterans also can receive FAX-back forms, in which VA forms are sent to the users FAX machine.

Veterans and their families now can contact VA's Central Office through the internet to ask questions about benefits, express concerns and register complaints. VA's Consumer Affairs Service in most cases provides same-day electronic responses to veterans about their medical care and benefits.

A Consumer Affairs Service staff member has dial-in capability to review incoming questions, said Clayton E. Cochran, whose office can be reached via **cochran.clayton@forum.va.gov**.