

# The truth about our MIAs — How much will it cost?

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Hopes for recovering the bodies of 1,300 Americans killed in Indochina and resolving the fate of another 850 listed as missing have risen in recent weeks.

But the price to the United States is likely to be high.

After lying dormant for seven months following the Communist victories in Indochina, the issue of the Missing in Action (MIAs) has surfaced almost simultaneously in several corners of the globe.

In Peking, Chinese leaders told President Ford this month that they had the remains of two Americans and could supply information on several others killed during or before the Vietnam War. In Paris, North Vietnamese diplomats met with a U.S. congressional delegation and offered to return the bodies of three American pilots.

In Saigon, a lone American — Mike Mielke of an MIA group called "Viya" — reportedly is continuing his efforts to get Communist officials to search for American MIAs.

Despite the gesture in Paris, most knowledgeable sources say they believe it is unlikely that North Vietnam will simply hand over information and remains without extracting some political or economic price.

Although denying it was bargaining, Hanoi in the past three years has linked MIA recovery to the fulfillment of a clause in the 1973 Paris peace accords calling for American aid in rebuilding war-battered North Vietnam.

The Vietnamese argument is that U.S. help in reconstruction — and, more recently, in not blocking North Vietnam's entry into the United Nations — would lead to normalized relations and, subsequently, to resolution of the MIA issue.

At Camp Samae San in Thailand, the Joint Casualty Resolution Center (JCRC) — the U.S. military group charged with the MIA search — is prepared to move into Vietnam with search teams.

"The thrust of our effort is to be ready if the circumstances permit us to continue recovery," Col. John Vollmer, the commanding officer of the JCRC said in a recent interview.

The JCRC already has contributed to alleviating the anxiety among next of kin. In May 1973, about 1,300 were listed as MIAs and another 1,100 U.S. servicemen as BNRs — men killed whose bodies had not been recovered. Today, the roster reads 850 MIAs and 1,300 BNRs — largely thanks to JCRC.