

# House Panel Says M.I.A.'s Are Dead

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By The Associated Press

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 15—A special committee of the House of Representatives concluded today that no Americans were still being held prisoner as a result of the Indochina war. The Pentagon lists 728 men as missing in action and 33 as prisoners.

Representative G. V. Montgomery, a Mississippi Democrat who headed the inquiry, said there was evidence that "Indo-Chinese nations can account for many of these men, not all of them, but many of them." Mr. Montgomery was chairman of the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia, appointed 15 months ago to investigate the issue.

He said the main problem now was

to achieve the fullest accounting possible. That this has not been done, he said, is the fault of the Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian authorities.

The committee recommended that the Pentagon resume its case reviews, suspended in deference to the panel's investigation. In a case review, officers evaluate the evidence on the circumstances of the serviceman's disappearance. The judgment in all cases so far has been to reclassify the man as killed in action.

When a serviceman is considered missing, his wife draws her husband's pay and allowances. If he is declared dead,

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she gets a lump-sum payment from the military and begins drawing Social Security payments. The average lump sum payment is about \$60,000, but figures vary widely.

In World War II and the Korean War, missing servicemen accounted for 22 percent of those killed in action, the committee report said. In Vietnam they totaled 4 percent. The panel said the difference was a result of the effective search and rescue effort during Indochina combat.

Representative Benjamin A. Gilman, an upstate New York Republican who was a panel member, opposed the recommendation to lift the Pentagon moratorium on case reviews. He said the reviews would tend to reduce the significance of the missing-in-action issue. He also said conclusive reviews required a full accounting by the Indochinese governments.

The committee is going out of business with the issuance of its report, Mr. Gilman noted, and thus an important instrument will be lost for focusing attention on the issue.

At a news conference, Mr. Montgomery said identification procedures were so comprehensive that all of the remains recovered have been identified. So far there is no unknown soldier in the Indochina war, he said.

The panel said 2,546 Americans, including 41 civilians, had not returned from the war. Of the 33 still listed as prisoners, the panel said 11 were believed to have been prisoners who were never accounted for by their captors. The others were improperly classified as prisoners or there is no evidence to suggest that they were taken prisoner, the report said.

The panel recommended that the Pentagon ease security restrictions on some of the evidence used in the case reviews, that a memorial for the missing be erected in Arlington National Cemetery and that trained rescue forces be available in future combat zones.

An organization representing families of the missing in action denounced the committee's recommendation.

"The conclusion that all P.O.W.'s and M.I.A.'s should be declared dead is ludicrous, particularly in light of the recently initiated negotiations between the United States and Vietnam," said Ann Griffiths, a member of the board of directors of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia.

"For the first time," she said, "we have an opportunity to obtain actual information on what happened to these missing Americans. The presumptuous members of the Select Committee are denying the incoming Carter administration an opportunity to conduct successful talks by stating, without proof, that all P.O.W.'s—M.I.A.'s are dead."

The question was raised by the United States last month in Paris when United States and Vietnamese diplomats opened talks on the establishment of normal relations between the two countries.