

POWS

Missing GIs

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— 'More Hope Than Fact'

Washington

Congress' most persistent advocate of the idea that many U.S. servicemen listed as missing in Vietnam are still alive said yesterday his belief "was based more on hope than fact."

"We must face the cruel, but hard facts that our MIAs lost their lives in the service of their nation," Representative G.V. Montgomery, (Dem-Miss.) told the annual convention of the National League of Families of POWs-MIAs.

His concession was dramatic because Montgomery, more than any other member of Congress, has maintained that U.S. servicemen were being held in captivity despite the end of hostilities.

His persistence led the House to create a House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia and he was named its chairman.

"Quite frankly, last September I believed we might be able to discover that anywhere from 150 to 250 U.S. servicemen were still being held as prisoners or managing a meager existence as men on the run in the countryside of Indochina," said Montgomery.

"However, I now realize this belief was based more on hope than fact and more on rumors than hard evidence. Like so many others, I wanted to believe they were still alive, so I did.

"While there still exists a slight possibility that a few men might be alive in Laos, we don't have any hard evidence to prove this.

"However, the fact that we have no confirmable evidence to prove our hopes of the past does not mean our nation should give up in its search for such evidence."

Montgomery also called for direct talks on the MIA issue between the United States and Vietnamese governments.

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