

JUL 26 1976

NYTimes

6

C

FORD VOWS TO HELP HUNT FOR LOST G.I.'S

Assures Families of Men
Missing in Indochina

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 25— President Ford has promised 500 relatives and friends of American servicemen still missing in Indochina that "I will not rest until a fullest possible accounting of your loved ones has been made."

In a short speech last night at the weekend convention of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, he reiterated a pledge that the Government would keep trying to get information on Americans still held in Southeast Asia.

The audience generally responded enthusiastically to the President's remarks and as he left they rose to sing "God Bless America." But not everyone was convinced by his speech.

"I shook his hand in the hall and I told him I didn't think he was doing everything he could," said Barbara Parker, the league's Oregon coordinator.

"He said, 'We are doing our best,' and I told him to do more," she added. Mrs. Parker's brother was shot down in Laos in 1972 and has not been heard from since.

Mr. Ford's challenger for the Republican Presidential nomination, Ronald Reagan, and the Democratic nominee, Jimmy Carter, sent telegrams that were read to the convention. They pledged to support continued efforts to get information.

The sponsors of the convention maintain that there are 1,300 Americans who were never accounted for in the Indochina conflict and they believe at least some could still be alive. Since the organization was formed in May 1970 it has been prodding the Government to get a full accounting.

In September 1975 the House of Representatives formed the Select Committee on Missing Persons and gave it one year and a budget of \$350,000 to investigate the problem. It has heard testimony from more than 100 people and members have met with Vietnamese representatives in Paris, Hanoi and Geneva.

At a meeting with some families Friday afternoon, the committee chairman, G. V. Montgomery, a Mississippi Democrat, said that "there is no hard evidence that any of the men are alive" and that he opposed an extension of the committee beyond the September deadline. But he said he would continue the investigation if the House extended the life of the committee.

Representative Montgomery promised that if the committee died, the interests of the families would be represented by other Congressional committees. He emphasized that the end of his committee would not signify "the end of the Government's effort to obtain information on the missing."

Three other members of the committee — James Lloyd, Democrat of California, and the Republicans Benjamin A. Gilman of New York and Tennyson Guyer of Ohio—all received loud applause when they said they favored an extension of the deadline.

Many of those present, however, were not satisfied.

"It stinks, what's going on here," said Jo Ann Waller of Philadelphia, who described herself as a "concerned citizen." She said: "only four of the 10 members of the committee are here today. Our men didn't ask to go over there to fight and they didn't ask to be abandoned by the Government, either."

Many of the families have pinned their last hopes on the committee's efforts. They fear that if it expires, the Defense Department will declare all the missing dead, eliminating the hope that the United States may some day force Southeast Asian countries to provide information on more missing in action.

At another meeting Roger Shields, Deputy Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, confirmed that the department might begin status changes on the 800 soldiers it still listed as missing if the House committee concluded that none were alive.

And Frank Sieverts, a State Department spokesman, told the families that the lack of substantial progress on accounting efforts resulted from the refusal of the Governments of Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia to provide information. Those three Governments are reportedly demanding a total of \$7.5 billion for reconstruction as a precondition of discussion of missing Americans.

Several people expressed anger at remarks made by an aide of Representative Montgomery, who earlier in the week charged that some of the families wanted to keep the missing-in-action status because they received more money than if the soldiers were declared dead. Others demanded that President Ford take the problem to the United Nations.

Several months ago the league invited President Ford to speak, but as late as Friday afternoon he had neither accepted nor declined. However, Earl P. Hopper, director of the league, reported that the White House had telephoned Friday to ask how many people were attending the convention, indicating that the President would appear.