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# Laos to allow U.S. to search crash site for bodies of MIAs

By Stephen Goldstein  
WASHINGTON TIMES STAFF

Laos has agreed to let a U.S. government team examine the site of a 1972 airplane crash for remains of missing American servicemen, the State Department said yesterday, confirming an earlier announcement by the Laotian government.

Spokesman John Hughes said a delegation from the Honolulu-based Joint Casualty Resolution Center would fly to Laos this week. The center was established in 1973 to investigate reports of U.S. prisoners of war and MIAs in Indochina. MIAs reportedly have been sighted in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

The Americans want to survey the site where an AC-130 military plane was shot down 11 years ago as American participation in the Vietnam War was drawing to a close, a U.S. Embassy spokesman in Bangkok said. U.S. rescue teams dispatched when the plane crashed in 1972 found two crew members alive and the remains of another. Thirteen persons are still unaccounted for.

The visit to a jungle area near Pekse, in the southern Laotian province of Sedone, will be the first by a U.S. government team to a crash site in Indochina since South Vietnam fell to the communist North in 1975.

An American spokesman in Bangkok said the Laotian government is allowing a preliminary inspection of the site to determine the logistical requirements for an excavation there.

The principal hope of the U.S. government, according to one administration source, is to accomplish the full excavation of the crash site soon after the return of the survey team. Excavation of many other sites may follow.

The Laotian government says no Americans are still alive in Laos. The United States says evidence it has makes it impossible to rule out the possibility that American servicemen may still be alive in Laos.

A National League of Families delegation, made up of relatives of MIAs, visited the crash site in September 1982. It found some human

remains, pieces of clothing and equipment in the wreckage, all spread over a wide area. Pieces of metal from the plane also were found sticking out of the ground.

Laos, but its agents have been unable to get access to examine crash sites for human remains. Members of the Joint Casualty Resolution Center last visited Laos in February, initiating what was believed to be the first official discussions on MIAs between the Laotian government and the United States. The talks ended in a blaze of publicity about the attempts of Bo Gritz, a former Green Beret officer, to find MIAs in Laos.

In order to resume the discussions, the United States gave Laos emergency medical supplies and cast its vote to approve Asian Development Bank loans to Laos last summer, the State Department said.

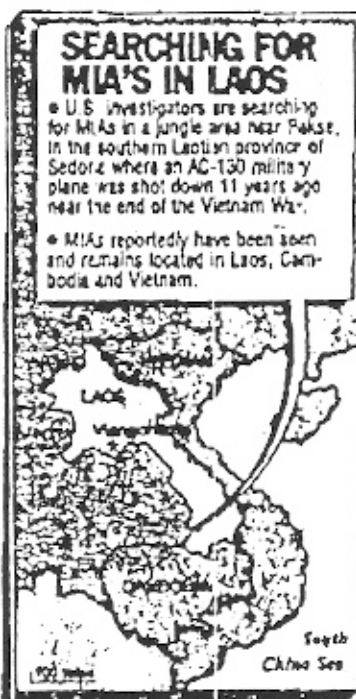
But it linked any moves to lift a legal prohibition on foreign aid to Laos with "sustained cooperation" on the issue of Americans missing in action.

In late January, President Reagan told the National League of Families, "We are fully prepared to take additional concrete steps with the Laos government to improve relations. I pledge to you that the progress on the POW/MIA issue will be the principal measure of their sincerity."

The president's statement was echoed by Rep. Stephen Solarz, D-N.Y., chairman of the Asian and Pacific subcommittee.

U.S. officials and the non-government center for POW/MIA Accountability called the Laotian acceptance of the mission a diplomatic breakthrough. In October, State Department and NSC officials visited Vientiane preparing for the current mission.

Mr. Hughes said the Laotian government said its agreement to allow the Honolulu team into Laos was prompted by "its humanitarian policy toward the families of Americans missing in action."



The United States has been seeking government-to-government agreements on accounting for some 2,500 servicemen missing in Southeast Asia, including 590 in

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## Mail for prisoner in Syria grows

A congressional appeal for Christmas cards and letters for a U.S. Navy aviator taken prisoner by Syrian forces in Lebanon has resulted in more than 30,000 pieces of mail, a House member active in the cause said yesterday.

Rep. Edward J. Markey, D-Mass., said the holiday messages for Lt. Robert O. Goodman Jr. will be

turned over to State Department officials tomorrow for transmittal to Damascus.

Lt. Goodman, 27, of Virginia Beach, Va., was taken captive Dec. 4 when the Navy attack plane in which he served as navigator-bombardier was shot down. The pilot was killed, but Syrian authorities said Lt. Goodman is in good health and is considered a prisoner of war.