



PRESS RELEASE



JOINT POW/MIA ACCOUNTING COMMAND (JPAC)

Public Affairs (808) 448-1938

www.jpac.pacom.mil

public_affairs@jpac.pacom.mil

Contact: Maj Ramon Osorio

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U.S. Navy Ship Joins Joint Humanitarian Search Effort Off Vietnam Coast

Hanoi, Vietnam – The longstanding cooperation between the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) on accounting for Americans missing from the Vietnam War broadened June 11 with the deployment of a U.S. Navy oceanographic survey ship to conduct search operations off the coast of Vietnam.

During the 95th search mission in Vietnam, which began May 25 and is scheduled until June 24 2009, representatives from the U.S. Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) and the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP) boarded the USNS Bruce C. Heezen, an oceanographic survey ship, for the humanitarian operation.

Although joint U.S.-SRV search teams have investigated and excavated underwater sites off the coast of Vietnam using Vietnamese boats before, this will be the first time Vietnam has allowed the use of a U.S. navy ship for underwater searches.

"The use of a U.S. Navy oceanographic survey ship on JPAC's search operations in Vietnam could significantly expedite the discovery of underwater crash sites," said Lt. Col. Todd Emoto, commander of JPAC's Detachment in Hanoi. "Vietnam's cooperation in allowing the ship to operate in her waters is a big step forward and greatly appreciated by the U.S. government and the families of those Americans still missing."

Manned by a civilian crew, the USNS Bruce C. Heezen provides oceanographic capabilities in coastal and deep ocean waters and is ideally suited to detect aircraft crash sites on the ocean floor. Hundreds of U.S. aircraft and their crews are still missing in Vietnam's coastal waters; JPAC currently only has accurate enough data to effectively search for a small percentage of these cases. The United States hopes the addition of the ship's capabilities will increase both the speed and effectiveness of the search for underwater sites.

The United States and Vietnam have cooperated during POW/MIA accounting missions since the 1980s, with both countries recently recognizing the 20-year anniversary of regularly scheduled joint search operations. Humanitarian missions receive strong support from both governments, and missions like this signify the growing U.S.-SRV bilateral relationship that has proven to be instrumental in JPAC's ability to accomplish its mission in achieving the fullest possible accounting of missing Americans who were lost in past conflicts.

According to JPAC, several families from the United States are enthusiastic and feel encouraged that the SRV is playing such a pivotal role in facilitating such humanitarian operations which could ultimately result in bringing closure to families of missing American service members.