POW/MIA Mission Reorganization Moves Forward

‘Mission accomplishment is what's important to the VFW’

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WASHINGTON — The nation’s largest war veterans’ organization is hopeful that the impending merger and realignment of several Defense Department organizations and functions will produce the necessary synergy to achieve the fullest possible accounting of missing service personnel from all wars.

“There's always been strong unity of purpose when it comes to recovering, identifying and returning fellow Americans to their families,” said John W. Stroud, national commander of the 1.9 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and its Auxiliaries, “but what’s been lacking is unity of command and direction, which is what the VFW is hopeful this reorganization will achieve.”

The decision to merge three organizations was made last year by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel after the accounting community came under intense congressional scrutiny.

Being merged are the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, and the Air Force Life Science Equipment Laboratory. The consolidation will include policy guidance, archival research and analysis, and worldwide field investigations and recovery operations. Also being realigned is the scientific element of the mission, which moves JPAC’s Central Identification Laboratory under the Armed Forces Medical Examiner. Included in the new look will be a centralized budget, a consolidated case management system, and expanded public-private partnerships.

The new organization has yet to be given a new name, but interim leadership was announced at a Pentagon meeting the VFW attended last week. Navy Rear Adm. Michael Franken will be the agency’s interim director. Air Force Maj. Gen. Kelly McKeague, JPAC’s current commander, will serve as deputy director. Army Lt. Gen. Michael Linnington, military deputy to the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, will be the

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agency's senior adviser to Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Christine Wormuth, whose office will oversee the new agency.

"Mission accomplishment is what's important to the VFW," said Stroud, "and we look forward to working with the new leadership to help keep America's promise to our military and all their families that we will not leave a fallen comrade on the battlefield."