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DAVID SWANSON / Staff Photographer

Bob Connor, a Vietnam War veteran who is helping the Vietnamese government identify mass graves of its soldiers killed during the war.

A GRAVE MISSION BACK TO VIETNAM

Thousands of miles and half a century separated retired Sgt. Bob Conner from his former duty station at Bien Hoa Air Base, Vietnam. An unexpected email brought him back - but for a very different mission.

From: [Bob Connor](#)

Subject: **Mass Graves, areas on or near Vietnam Air Bases.**

A Humanitarian effort to locate MIAs.

Fellow VSPA members.

I need your help with locating gravesites in Vietnam around Air Bases we served at during the Vietnam War.

Some of you may have heard about the U.S. and Vietnam Mass Grave location project that started in October 2016. To save time, take a minute and read the [Philadelphia Inquirer article](#)⁽¹⁾ published September 20, 2017 detailing the project's start, and the initial mass grave excavation of Vietnamese KIAs at Bien Hoa Air Base (Tet 1968). When you see the clip of the burial service for the initial 80 remains found at Bien Hoa, you'll see most of the 1500 people who attended this service, and came from 29 different Provinces to witness this ceremony. It was as meaningful and heartfelt a ceremony for these Vietnamese families, as it would be for American families.

Our own former Capt. Marty Strones (VSPA) was instrumental in pinpointing this initial grave at Bien Hoa Air Base. We have located a mass grave of 673, just off the NE corner. We still need to locate a mass grave in the area of the SE corner containing 424 remains, and another mass grave not far from the bomb dump perimeter.

At former Tan Son Nhut Air Base, the only grave found to date was excavated in 1995, near O-51 Bunker. Still, there are no firm details on the location of over 800 Vietnamese remains believed to be in that area.

With the help of other U.S. soldiers and pilots, we have provided the Vietnam Government with the locations of mass graves containing over 5,000 remains. After the war the U.S. listed 2,646 Americans as unaccounted for.⁽²⁾ To date, Vietnam has been instrumental in locating and returned over 1000 U.S. MIA remains, reducing our MIA list to 1597. Vietnam still has 300,000 MIAs.

I need the help of our USAF Security Police. It does not matter if you were there for the battle. If you're aware of a gravesite, or heard rumors of a gravesite, on or off an Air Base,

this is where we start. We are asking our members to look back and try to recall attacks where enemy KIAs may have been buried on or off base. Veterans may look at old photos, or simply close their eyes and remember various events.

If you or others you know have photos of a gravesite, or the area adjacent, this information is like gold to Search Teams. From such photos we can create overlays using items within the photo that are still in view today. For instance, in December, Search Teams will excavate a gravesite of approximately 70 remains, at Dau Tieng. Its discovery started with just an aerial view of a suspected grave location. Apparently, that grave was just dug alongside a road, and then forgotten. That photo of a base-road in the area, helped to verify which base it was at, and hopefully result in remains returned home to their families.

Today we rely on finding one or two witnesses who can help identify and confirm a gravesite's location. Vietnamese searchers then try to find the site in the general area. This manual human process can consume at least six months, just to find a witness that can help, and another two months to finalize plans.

In March, I will be taking at least five soldiers with me to Vietnam, at the invitation of the Vietnamese Government and Military. We will be visiting Dau Tieng and several other graves sites where U.S. and Vietnamese search teams have been working on.

Since most of us are at least ages 68–80's, our time is running out. When U.S. and Vietnamese war veterans are gone ... MIA veterans' remains are unlikely *ever* to be recovered—they will truly be left behind, *forever*. I understand the battles resulting in USA and Vietnam casualties were events many U.S. veterans have tried to suppress for decades. Nevertheless, U.S. and Vietnamese veterans, and villagers, have stepped forward to report locations where buried KIA remains might be found.

You can make a difference. Consider what a MIA family has endured for decades, remembering their son or father walk out the door for the last time. They are no different from our own families, had nothing to do with the war, and continue to pray and hope someone can help.

Thank you for your time and attention to this humanitarian effort. If you know a friend that might be able to help, please share this email and link.

Sincerely,

Bob Connor

3rd Security Police SQD
Bien Hoa 4/1967 - 4/1968



connor2207@comcast.n... on September 10

As you look up the road where it makes a hard right. At that intersection is where the 3rd Security Police manned Bunker Hill 10. Significant battle took place here at the start of the Tet Offensive '68. Those VC killed had to be buried in a mass grave at the end of the runway. From Nov '67 til about 1/3/68 I worked nights atop the base water tower (aka Delta 18) near the BX. I would spot the mortar and rocket flashes as the incoming started. The base siren would be set off giving those sleeping about 7 seconds to wake up and get to a bunker. Sgt. Bob Connor, 3rd Security Police Sq., 4/5/67 - 4/5/68.



(1) http://www.philly.com/philly/news/special_packages/How_a_Google_Earth_search_led_a_veteran_back_to_Vietnam_to_track_down_mass_graves.html

(2) MIA Fact Site: http://www.miafacts.org/how_many_missing.htm

**Current Status of Unaccounted-for Americans Lost in the Vietnam War
per DPAA reporting**

| | Vietnam | Laos | Cambodia | China | Total |
|----------------------------|---------|------|----------|-------|--------------|
| Original Missing | 1,973 | 573 | 90 | 10 | 2,646 |
| Repatriated and Identified | 722 | 282 | 42 | 3 | 1,049 (1) |
| Remaining Missing | 1,251 | 291 | 48 | 7 | 1,597 |