Bound by Duty: Military Wives, The National League of Families, and the Central Identification Laboratory of Hawaii (CILHI)

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Abstract: In 1972, amid the Vietnam War, Anne Montgomery Nagle Hart, a young military wife and mother, received word that her husband's plane had been shot down over the Laotian jungle. The military instructed her to patiently wait for answers and trust that they had everything under control. Desperate for information about her missing husband, she joined the National League of Families. In doing so, Anne stepped out of her role as a subservient military wife into that of an advocate for missing servicemen, helping catalyze improvements in military identification efforts in the United States. Set among the backdrop of the societal and political turmoil of the Vietnam War, this case highlights the unique relationship between military wives and the United States government. As both a loyal military wife and the loving partner of a missing serviceman, Anne finds that her responsibilities to her country and husband conflict. This case demonstrates how Anne navigates competing expectations that ask her to challenge the authority of the highly gendered institution of the military to seek justice for her husband.

Welcome to the Jungle

In 1972, near the end of the Vietnam War, anti-aircraft fire shot down a United States Air Force AC-130A Spectre that was conducting an armed reconnaissance mission along the Ho Chi Minh Trail (See Appendix A). The AC-130A Spectre functioned as a gunship, carrying radar equipment, electronic firing pits, canons, and other specialized artillery. The United States Air Force had assigned sixteen crewmen to this mission, and they were on board the plane when anti-aircraft fire broke through the fuselage, punctured the fuel tanks, and spewed flammable aircraft fuel throughout. The pilot attempted a controlled descent, but when he realized that the vessel would likely crash, he ordered the crew to parachute to safety from the rear of the aircraft. Only two managed to exit the plane before it burst into a fiery ball of flames and disappeared into the tree canopy on the outskirts of Pakse, Laos (Maples 1994). An American search and rescue team retrieved these two survivors, and the following day, Laotian troops combed the crash site in search of the remaining crewmen. Officials found a partially intact arm and fingerprint analysis confirmed that the remains belonged to one of the servicemen (1994). The search team did not discover any other remains at this time, and United States officials determined that the crewman whose arm was recovered at the scene was "killed in action" (KIA) (1994). The military listed the 13 remaining crewmembers as "missing in action" (MIA) (Supreme Court of the United States 1990).

After 10 years, in September of 1982, a group of female National League of Families members flew by helicopter alongside American diplomats and reporters to the site of the plane

crash in the remote jungles of Laos (Getlin 1986).[1] The wives of the Pakse crew traveled to the crash site with the League, aiming to uncover details about AC-130A Spectre and visit the site of their husbands' disappearance. The government had provided little information in the 10 years since the crash, leaving the families determined to find answers themselves. Among this group was Anne Montgomery Nagle Hart a 40-year-old mother of six whose husband, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas T. Hart III, was missing.[2]

At the site, which had remained unexamined since the initial search, the visitors saw wreckage that confirmed a plane had indeed crashed there. Anne noticed several small white fragments that she believed were bone lying among the scattered wreckage (Getlin 1986). She handed these pieces over to the military, which directed them to its main laboratory, the Central Identification Laboratory of Hawaii (CILHI), for analysis (Maples 1994). After confirming that Anne's discovery was human bone, CILHI sent a team to excavate the site in search of more remains.

Shortly after, the United States Army contacted the families of the thirteen missing servicemen with news that the laboratory had positively identified each man, and that the government would change all statuses from MIA to KIA (Supreme Court of the United States 1990). Many families were grateful to receive notice from the government and finally have closure about their loved ones. While the military began the process of distributing the remains to the families, Anne, who had held the tiny, fragmented bone shards in her hands, wondered how anyone could have reached a conclusion given the state of the remains (Getlin 1986).

Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) testing and other advanced technologies that are used to link missing individuals with remains were developed in the late 1980s, and the United States government did not utilize DNA testing until 1988 (National Research Council (US) Committee on DNA Technology in Forensic Science 1992). The Pakse case predates the widespread implementation of these forensic methods, yet CILHI claimed to have positively identified the 13 Pakse servicemen who had been lost for over a decade (National Research Council (US) Committee on DNA Technology in Forensic Science 1992). CILHI did not reveal what methods it used in the Pakse identifications, and Anne wondered how the laboratory could have confidently matched the small bone fragments with each serviceman. As a military wife, Anne was entrenched in military society and the government expected her unwavering loyalty. Though the military expected her to rely on the institution to provide for her, Anne hesitated: how much should she trust the identification that the military had given her?

The "American War"[3]

The Vietnam War, the United States' second longest lasting conflict, spanned from 1954 to 1975 (Van Zyl 2017). Even before the official start of the war, Vietnam experienced much political and military turmoil from French imperialism. In 1954, the Viet Minh, a Vietnamese communist military regime successfully overthrew French colonial rule under the command of Ho Chi Minh.

At the Geneva Conference in 1954, France and the Viet Minh agreed to end the war and officially withdraw French troops from Vietnam. The Geneva Accords, passed on July 21, 1954,

[1] National League of Families, National League of POW/MIA Families, and National League of Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia are used synonymously as they refer to the same organization. All uses of League reference this organization.
[2] Anne Montgomery Nagle Hart will be further referred to as Anne Hart or simply Anne.
[3] In Vietnamese, the name given to the Vietnam War quite literally means the "American War", which reflects the United States' involvement.

created a cease-fire line along the 17th parallel through Vietnam to allow military troops to regroup and withdraw (Van Zyl 2017). While not a true political border, the parallel effectively split Vietnam in two, creating the communist state of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the democratic state of the Republic of Vietnam. Western nations have historically referred to these states as North Vietnam and South Vietnam (2017).

This occurred against the backdrop of the Cold War, during which the United States viewed communism as a threat to democracy and aimed to stop its spread across the globe (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum n.d.). Recognizing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's communist leadership, the United States assumed the task of "saving" South Vietnam from communist rule. South Vietnam was not only fighting communism from the outside, but also was battling rural communist sympathizers, which Americans referred to as the Viet Cong, from within.[4] The United States worked to support South Vietnam with resources and military tactics but was hesitant to put American boots on the ground (Van Zyl 2017). While the Northern Vietnamese invaded South Vietnam through the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, the United States attempted to create democratic strongholds in neighboring countries (2017).

In August of 1964, after Northern Vietnamese boats attacked two American ships in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of Vietnam, the United States decided to join the war (Van Zyl 2017). To meet the demand for soldiers, President Lyndon B. Johnson issued a military draft in 1965, which sent 2.5 million young American men to Vietnam (2017). For years, United States forces worked tirelessly to intercept supply lines such as the Ho Chi Minh Trail, attack Northern Vietnamese forces, and weaken the Viet Cong uprising in South Vietnam (2017). In 1967 and 1968, Viet Cong resistance barraged American troops across South Vietnam, coinciding with much debate over the Vietnam War back home on American soil (2017).

Millions of Americans criticized the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War and questioned if it was the country's battle to fight. Citizens weighed if the efforts to limit the spread of communism constituted the financial burden and loss of American lives (Van Zyl 2017). Anti-war activists, including pacifists, students, and communists, publicly protested the war (2017). Young men who had been selected for the draft also opposed the war, and many evaded it out of concern for their lives and families. Critiques of the war efforts only escalated as men failed to return home and the number of prisoners of war (POW) and MIA listings grew.

A Young Wife and A Military Husband

While American servicemen fought overseas, young wives and mothers remained at home to take care of their families. Anne, one of these women, was born on October 9, 1942, in Virginia (The Pensacola News Journal 2018). In her early twenties, she married Thomas T. Hart III of Orlando, Florida, and they settled in Pensacola, Florida (Eddieb 2012) (See Appendix B). By the time Anne was thirty years old, she was a mother of six children: Kimberley, Thomas, Gillian, Heather, Joseph, and Hillary (See Appendix C). She was dedicated to her children and family, and she was a proud housewife.

The only information that exists about Anne remembers her through her role and actions as a young military wife. Her husband was an enlisted member of the United States Air Force and worked his way up the ranks to the position of lieutenant colonel (Eddieb 2012). He served as an Air Force navigator in Vietnam early in the war (2012). In 1971 and 1972, though the military began withdrawing servicemen from Vietnam, the United States tasked the remaining ground

[4] The term "Viet Cong" is derived from the Vietnamese phrase "cong san Viet Nam", which translates to "Vietnamese communist".

troops and Air Force squadrons to continue canvassing and disrupting supply chains along the Ho Chi Minh Trail (Van Zyl 2017). In October of 1972, the military assigned Thomas to partake in these reconnaissance missions. Just two months later, he ultimately disappeared in the Pakse plane crash, leaving his young wife and family behind for good (Getlin 1986).

America's Wives

No one was more concerned about the growing POW/MIA issue than the Vietnam servicemen's wives. Though servicemen continued to disappear, the government expected career military wives like Anne to support "Uncle Sam" unwaveringly and make this loyalty visible to the public. As a military wife, Anne belonged to a unique, exclusive community with strict guidelines and expectations for its members. The United States military is a highly gendered institution that reproduces and upholds traditional gender roles and expects all participants to conform to these guidelines (Ziff 2020, p. 4). Military wives particularly feel the weight of these expectations, particularly during times of war.

The unspoken laws that dictate how military wives should act are based on the ideas of republican motherhood and the cult of true womanhood (Lee 2019). Republican motherhood, which gained popularity in the eighteenth century, emphasized the idea that women's primary role was to serve as mothers and raise morally responsible children for the nation (2019). This idea evolved into the cult of true womanhood which encouraged women to embrace values including submissiveness and purity (2019). Together, these outlooks entrenched the idea that women occupying positions across society should be dedicated to their husbands, families, and homes above all else.

Upon entering the military community, the government handed military wives guidelines that carefully detailed how these women should act and represent themselves. Guides such as *The Army Wife Handbook, Mrs. NCO,* and *Mrs. Field Grade* defined the role of a military wife and encouraged new members of this community to embrace the gendered expectations that came with the title (Dobrofsky 1977; Ziff 2020). To the United States' government, the primary duty of a military wife was to support her husband and complement his role as a serviceman (Dobrofsky 1977). These wives reflected their husbands, who reflected the military and government. It was in the best interest of their families, communities, and country for military wives to embrace traditional notions of femininity and act according to their handbooks' guidelines.

These books spelled out what behavior was "acceptable" and "feminine" and earned the title of "good military spouse" (Ziff 2020, p. 8). It was expected that military wives always be helpful, supportive, empathetic, and have a smile on their faces. 'Good' military wives were conventionally attractive, polished, and fit. They could volunteer or have a small job if it did not detract from their primary role as domestic caretakers or supersede their husbands' work. These women were expected to attend social events such as receptions, reviews, and luncheons on their husbands' arms as visible displays of their husbands' success in their work and home lives (Dobrofsky 1977). To be a military wife was to accept "limited career mobility, lower wages, and dampened aspirations" and commit to a life of full dependency on one's husband and the institution of the military (Ziff 2020, p. 4).

Bearing dual responsibility to their husbands and the United States military, the POW/MIA issue complicated military wives' allegiances. Anne, alongside other wives of POW/MIAs across the country, begged the government for any information about their missing husbands. They wanted to know if the servicemen were being tortured, where they were last seen, or if they were even alive. The military viewed these wives as a hindrance to war efforts and attributed their

desperation and anguish to their gender (Brown 2005). The military ignored the families' requests for information and claimed it would be in the best interest of the missing men for their wives to stay quiet and trust the government to locate them (Lee 2019). One wife noted that she felt that military officials demanded her to control her emotions and that they stressed the importance of staying calm and withholding any concerns (Brown 2005). The government told the women that they believed that the POWs were being treated fairly, but if the wives spoke to the media, any information could be used against the men by their captors (Lee 2019). To ensure the North Vietnamese continued to treat their husbands in a civilized manner, the wives must act as though there were no issues and remain silent (2019).

Despite the government's expectation that the military wives follow this command, Anne and other military wives struggled to follow suit. While the government reported less Vietnam servicemen as POW/MIA than in earlier conflicts such as the Korean War or World War II (WWII), there remained thousands of men in this category (Van Zyl 2017). Records estimate that around 700 Americans were imprisoned throughout the war (2017). Life in these prisons included interrogation, torture, and unsanitary living conditions (2017). Military wives heard rumors of these prisons, and they did not know if their husbands had died, become prisoners, or were fighting to survive in the jungle (2017). Many of these women never received answers; around 2,500 American servicemen became MIA, and the military never discovered what happened to greater than 90% of them (2017).

Missing Men and Ever-Present Women

After the disappearance of their husbands, the lives of these wives changed dramatically. While second-wave feminism—better known as the Women's Liberation Movement—began during the Vietnam War Era and worked to provide women with agency and independence in their daily lives, society still expected women to embrace the role of homemaker and focus their energies on being wives and mothers (Farr n.d.; Lee 2019). Men served as financial administrators of the household, especially in families where wives did not work. As a housewife, Anne relied on her husband to buy a house, take out a mortgage, sign a lease, and register a car (2019). For many women, these were unfamiliar expectations and responsibilities.

The financial aspect of the POW/MIA classification proved to be a real issue for many women. Women could not withdraw money from their husbands' military accounts without their permission (Lee 2019). Few men signed over power of attorney to their wives before leaving for war, and without their husbands' signatures, these women had little autonomy (2019). Additionally, the government could deny women financial compensation for the loss of their husbands if servicemen failed to endorse their wives as beneficiaries (2019). Not only could the government outright reject payment to families who did not have their paperwork in order, there was a financial disincentive that kept wives from requesting status reviews and pushing for the government to investigate. In 1976, the House Select Committee on MIAs reviewed financial compensations provided to the families of servicemen listed as POW/MIA/KIA (Rosenthal 1985). On average, families of MIA servicemen received $100,000 more than those of servicemen listed as KIA, which is equivalent to approximately $550,000 in 2024 (1985). For women who relied on their husbands for financial support, this payout was the only way to keep their families afloat. Some women could not afford to lose this money, and they felt the need to stop pressuring the government to investigate in the case that their husbands would be found dead. Whether intentional or not, this government practice effectively discouraged wives from making inquiries.

The military wife identity only compounded these challenges and made it more difficult for women to speak out against the government. For women like Anne whose husbands were actively deployed, military bases created closed, independent communities. Military wives could access restaurants, shops, and entertainment without ever leaving base (Dobrofsky 1977). Reduced prices of goods on base encouraged these women to stay in these communities, keeping them away from life outside the gates. Moreso, life on military bases enabled military wives to support each other through experiences that were foreign to civilian women including unemployment, frequent relocation, and absent husbands (1977). The military and government claimed to provide everything that military wives could ever need, effectively physically and emotionally separating them from the rest of the world (1977). Though serving as the sole provider for these women and their families, the government took the idea of the military wife as an extension of her husband to heart. First, the government viewed wives exclusively through the lens of their connection with their husbands (Ziff 2020). The government expected these wives to be seen and not heard and gave more favor and consideration to women with high-ranking husbands (2020). These ranks, bestowed upon servicemen by the government, also created a class system among wives. Women's social status directly stemmed from their husband's rank, and wives were expected to remain cognizant of where they fell in this hierarchy (2020). Since the military husband was key to the military wife's identity and social position, divorced and widowed women were not welcomed in these communities (Dobrofsky 1977). As the Vietnam War continued and servicemen like Thomas failed to return home, Anne and other military wives were forced to navigate a situation not covered by their guidebooks and had to consider their identities and expectations in a world without their husbands.

As Anne waited for the military's investigation into the crash to reveal answers about her husband, she attempted to continue with her life and care for her children, as the government instructed. Anne recognized that she completely depended upon the life that the military provided her. By voicing any criticism of the war or requesting more information about Thomas, she would defy the government's orders, further challenging her position in the military wife community (Lee 2019). Anne was not alone in this situation. MIA/POW wives across the United States found themselves ostracized in their communities, considering their conflicting duties to their husbands and their country (2019).

The National League of Families

If the government viewed the MIA/POW wives such as Anne as individuals rather than as a collective force, it was easy to ignore their letters and simply cast them off as emotional women (Lee 2019). In 1966, POW and MIA wives on the West Coast of the United States decided to organize as the League of Wives of American Vietnam Prisoners of War (2019). Sybil Stockdale, a POW wife whose husband, James Stockdale, had been shot down over North Vietnam in 1965 and had been captured, led the group. (The League of Wives Memorial Project). As an organization, the government considered them more legitimate than as individuals (Lee 2019). In 1970, the League of Wives of American Vietnam Prisoners of War expanded to become the National League of Families of Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia (The League of Wives Memorial Project). Also known as the National League of POW/MIA Families, the organization aimed to prevent the nation from forgetting about the missing servicemen and to "obtain the release of all prisoners, the fullest possible accounting for the missing and repatriation of all recoverable remains of those who died serving our nation during the Vietnam War" (National League of Families of American Prisoners & Missing in Southeast Asia 2023, n.p.). Membership in the

National League of POW/MIA Families provided these military wives with an opportunity to act outside of their traditionally passive role and advocate for themselves and their families.

After months without receiving further information from the government regarding the fate of her husband, Anne reflected to herself, "You've cried for three months. What else can you do?" (Getlin 1986, n.p.). As a military wife entirely dependent upon the institution, the government expected her to patiently wait for answers, but as Thomas' wife, she felt that it was her duty to advocate for him (1986). Anne joined her local branch of the National League of Families in March 1973 where she met several other families that also sought justice for their loved ones that were cast off and forgotten as POWs and MIAs (1986). Together, these servicemen's wives contacted congressmen, organized events to spread awareness of the POW/MIA issue and pressured the military to share information about their missing men (1986).

In 1975, Anne became the League director for Florida and a regional coordinator for the Southeast United States (Getlin 1986). Over the next few years, Anne and the League researched the Pakse crash. They learned that the plane had exploded in the air before making impact (1986). In 1977, the Army released a letter to the families of the Pakse crew stating that five deployed parachutes and bloody bandages had been found at the site, providing concrete evidence to suggest that some of the servicemen may have survived the incident (1986). Understandably, the wives of the officers involved were frustrated to only learn these details five years after the crash. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* years later, Anne expressed her anger:

> Why couldn't they have told us this sooner? I realize the Army has to take time to review its intelligence reports and all, but in so many ways we were just left in the dark. (Getlin 1986, n.p.)

As Americans tired of hearing about the Vietnam War and focused on new headlines, the United States' efforts to bring home missing servicemen slowed even further (Rosenthal 1985). In 1977, the Presidential Commission on Americans Missing and Unaccounted For in Southeast Asia issued a letter to U.S. President Jimmy Carter about servicemen that remained missing (United States Department of State). In this letter, the commission concluded that there was "no evidence to indicate that any American prisoners from the Indochina conflict remain alive" (United States Department of State, n.p.). Government search efforts ceased and the military reclassified MIAs to KIAs.

Families did not want the government to stop investigating their missing loved ones' cases. On October 1, 1978, the government held a status hearing on the Pakse case and officially reclassified the missing crewmen as KIA (Supreme Court of the United States 1990). The military had not found any new information pertaining to the case to justify reclassification. Though Anne was losing hope that her husband had survived, she believed that there was evidence that the military was yet to find. When the military questioned whether she believed that her husband was alive at the hearing, she stated that she did not, recounting that the plane had exploded mid-air (1990). In a threatening comment at the hearing, she expressed her belief that more evidence remained at the crash site:

> I fully expect that when the government or individuals are allowed back into Laos, that one of us will go to the crash site and make some recovery of any possible remains. I hope if the opportunity arises, the federal government will get there before I do. (Getlin 1986, n.p.)

When Ronald Reagan was elected as President of the United States in 1980, national interest in the MIA/POW issue resurfaced. Reagan included the issue in his campaign, claiming that it was one of his priorities to bring these men home (Rosenthal 1985). The Reagan Administration communicated with the Vietnamese and Laotian governments to uncover information about the missing servicemen from the Vietnam War (Reagan 1984). Additionally, the media stirred the rumor that multiple Vietnamese refugees had claimed to have seen American POWs held captive by the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces, bringing the issue back to the spotlight of the American public (Halloran 1986).

The National League of Families organized trips to Southeast Asia to demonstrate their dedication to the issue and increase news coverage (National League of Families of American Prisoners & Missing in Southeast Asia 2023). Anne's visit to the Pakse crash site was one of these travels (Getlin 1986). The military hoped that these trips would quell criticism of the POW/MIA issue and provide families with answers, but Anne's discovery of the remains only brought more questions to the surface (Maples 1994).

The U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory of Hawaii (CILHI)

When Anne discovered the remains at the crash site, she turned them over to the Army who then gave them to the United States Army Central Identification Laboratory of Hawaii (CILHI) for processing. The Army established CILHI in 1976 to allow for more centralized identification efforts as the number of servicemen listed as MIA/POW increased. Prior to this, independent military laboratories had performed analysis of skeletal remains (Maples 1994). CILHI's teams aimed to recover servicemen's remains, identify the individuals found, and return these men to their families (Quigley 2014).

CILHI used forensic anthropology methods to excavate and identify the remains. Forensic anthropology is a specialized subdiscipline of biological anthropology that applies anthropological methodology to questions of medicolegal significance (Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History). Forensic anthropologists are expertly trained in skeletal anatomy and perform skeletal analysis to conclude information including age, sex, stature, ancestry, time since death, and trauma (Belcher 2022). Additionally, forensic anthropologists are trained in archaeology and are skilled at field recovery and excavation of human remains (Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, n.d.). In cases where enough soft tissue remains and bodies are found soon after death, forensic anthropologists are unnecessary, and a traditional autopsy that examines the whole body can suffice. In the cases that involved the remains of servicemen that had been missing for years, the only hope for identification lay in what information forensic anthropologists could glean from the bones (Belcher 2022).

Anne's discovery of the remains pressured the United States government to acknowledge the League's requests for further inquiry into the Pakse case. In 1983, the United States government recruited a team of CILHI forensic experts to excavate the Pakse site. As the result of political squabbling between the United States government and the Laotian government, the team could not go to Laos until February 1985 (Getlin 1986). Because they believed the ammunition on board likely caused explosions for several hours after impact, the Army instructed the CILHI excavation and recovery team to set up a wide and deep search area to locate any scattered remains. The CILHI team dug 15 feet and canvassed the search area for pieces of the wreckage and bone

fragments (1986). They used traditional field recovery methods such as field searches and equipment that included hand tools and sifting screens (1986). After 14 days of site excavation, the recovery team shipped more than 50,000 bone fragments to Honolulu for analysis at CILHI (1986). The remains were tiny, shattered bits of bone that ranged from shavings to a few-inch-long segments (1986).

When CILHI examined the Pakse crew's remains in 1985, CILHI's chief biological anthropologist was Tadao Furue, a Japanese forensic anthropologist with a background in combat identifications (Getlin 1986). At this time, CILHI was housed in a vastly underfunded complex; the building did not even have hot water (Maples 1994). Only a handful of assistants worked alongside Furue, and many of the books and laboratory instruments personally belonged to him (1994).

CILHI maintained possession of the Pakse crew's remains for several months for analysis. At the end of this period, Furue announced that his team had successfully linked the remains to each of the thirteen missing men. The Armed Services Graves Registration Office (ASGRO) reviewed the proposed identifications and approved them on July 1, 1985 (Supreme Court of the United States 1990). The Army contacted Anne to inform her that seven bone fragments belonged to her husband (Supreme Court of the United States 1990). Some of these bones assigned to Thomas included the ones that Anne had picked up at the crash site (Getlin 1986).

A Second Opinion

Having seen the fractured remains herself, Anne questioned how CILHI had identified any of the fragments as belonging to any of the Pakse crew in their poor state. Upon releasing the identifications, CILHI failed to reveal how it had come to its conclusions, which caused Anne to hesitate. Furthermore, she continued to uncover how the government had withheld important facts about the case from her and the other families. She learned about an additional Army report that detailed a 1973 aerial photo, taken miles away from the crash, that depicted giant characters burned into the grass (1986). According to the report, these letters and numbers appeared to read "1973 TH" or "1953 TH", and officials thought that they could be linked to Thomas Hart as these were his initials (1986). Anne believed that this detail suggested that Thomas might have survived the initial crash (1986). The Army later deleted this report after they classified Thomas as KIA, claiming that they believed he died upon impact and therefore could not have created these figures (1986). Still, Anne maintained hope that Thomas had survived and refused to accept any remains until she received more specific information that detailed how CILHI had concluded that they belonged to her husband (1986).

With dwindling confidence in the government's transparency and concern for her family's best interests, Anne's responsibility to seek justice for Thomas as his wife and the government's expectation that she demonstrate complete faith in the institution as a military wife clashed. In July 1985, Anne sought an independent forensic anthropologist to examine the remains that the military claimed belonged to her husband. Anne contacted Dr. Michael Charney, the Director of the Center of Human Identification at Colorado State University, who agreed to perform another examination (Getlin 1986; Maples 1994). On July 5, 1985, Anne asked the United States District Court for the Northern District of California to request that Dr. Charney have an opportunity to review all remains before releasing them to their respective families (Supreme Court of the United States 1990). The families of the other servicemen were eager to bury their loved ones and did not appreciate Anne's interference. By questioning the identifications, Anne had outrightly expressed

her lack of the unwavering trust in the government that a traditional military wife should hold. Family members called Anne to express their frustration with her actions, and one mother even sent a letter to the court, stating that any potential delay in burial would be "intolerant and outrageous" (Getlin 1986, n.p.). Dr. Charney only performed his examination on the remains that the laboratory had identified as belonging to Thomas (Supreme Court of the United States 1990). Dr. Charney's conclusion did not surprise Anne:

> It is impossible to determine whether they are from one individual or several, or whether they are even from any of the crew members of the AC-130A aircraft in question. (United States Congress House 1987, n.p.)

The Secretary of the Air Force at the time, Verne Orre, reviewed Dr. Charney's report and told Anne that if she rejected her claim to the remains, they would be buried at Arlington National Cemetery (Supreme Court of the United States 1990). The Army also received word of Dr. Charney's report and decided to conduct an inquiry into CILHI. When Anne discovered that this was to occur, she contacted Secretary Orre to request that the burial be delayed until after the investigation (1990). Secretary Orre obliged, and Anne awaited the results of the inquiry.

CILHI Under Fire

In December of 1985, the Army reached out to three well-known forensic anthropologists—Dr. William Maples, Dr. Ellis Kerley, and Dr. Lowell Levine—asking whether they would evaluate CILHI's procedures and identification ability (Maples 1994). As university professors across the country, these anthropologists were well regarded in their field and trained in specialty topics including forensic dentistry and cross section analysis (1994).

The Army allowed the evaluation team two and a half days to conduct their review. While the Army instructed the team to consider the laboratory's capabilities in general, the forensic anthropologists concluded that the Pakse identifications seemed to be baseless (Getlin 1986, Maples 1994). As all Pakse crewmen were male, white, and young, there was little discrepancy among individuals (Maples 1994). At this time, DNA's application in forensic casework was severely limited, and forensic anthropologists used elements of the biological profile to narrow down possible identifications (Maples 1994; National Research Council (US) Committee on DNA Technology in Forensic Science 1992). Without more complete remains, the team determined that they could only positively identify two of the 13 servicemen using the standard methods of the time (Maples 1994). In their report, the forensic anthropologists criticized CILHI and noted that with the poor conditions of the remains, it was impossible to make further identifications. The results of the inquiry brought all of the identifications into question and encouraged Anne to continue pressuring the military to investigate the Pakse case (Maples 1994; Getlin 1986).

The team published their report in January 1986, revealing CILHI's shortcomings. Immediately, the Army informed Anne that Thomas' burial would be "delayed indefinitely" (Getlin 1986, n.p.). The Air Force contacted the families of the Pakse crewmen and offered to reexamine the remains and reconsider the identifications (Supreme Court of the United States 1990). Anne hoped that other wives would also request reconsideration, but most of them had already buried the remains given to them and moved on (Getlin 1986). Only one other family accepted this offer: that of Captain George McDonald (Supreme Court of the United States 1990). On June 10, 1986, ASGRO officially rescinded the identifications of Thomas and George and reopened their cases (Supreme Court of the United States 1990).

A Military Wife Takes on the United States Government

While Anne was pleased that the government investigated and reopened her case, she also was frustrated that she could not trust the information presented to her in her time of need (Getlin 1986). In 1986, in an outright rejection of military wife expectations, Anne challenged the United States government in a court of law. She sued the United States of America in the United States District Court for the Ninth District of Florida on behalf of herself, her daughter, Gillian Elaine Hart, and her mother-in-law, Vera Lee Hart (Justia Law 1990). She claimed that the United States had violated the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA), 28 U.S.C 1346 (b), 2671-2680 by causing intentional infliction of emotional distress. This tort required evidence that an accused party acted in an intentionally reckless manner that resulted in another party's emotional suffering (Cornell Law School: Legal Information Institute 2022). Anne claimed that the military's actions relating to the disappearance and misidentification of her husband and her subsequent distress constituted this claim (Supreme Court of the United States 1990).

The United States of America filed a motion to dismiss the charges, but the district court found that the government was liable (Supreme Court of the United States 1990). The court reasoned that the initial identification was outrageous based on the evidence CILHI had to work with, that Secretary Orr had given Anne an "improper 'ultimatum'" in leading her to believe that she would lose possession of the remains if she did not officially claim them, and that the Department of Defense had no evidence to suggest that all servicemen perished in the crash (1990, n.p.). The district court ordered that the government pay $632,814.62 to the petitioners: $382,814.62 to Anne and $125,000 each to Gillian and Vera (Justia Law 1990).

Immediately, the United States of America appealed the decision to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit (Justia Law 1990). Here, the court reversed the decision, citing that the government did not intend to inflict emotional distress and that all actions were conducted in "good faith" (Supreme Court of the United States 1990, n.p.) The court stated that since military remains were often fragmented, burned, and commingled, forensic anthropologists working for CILHI may need to move beyond conventional scientific practices in their attempts to identify missing personnel (Supreme Court of the United States 1990). Finally, the court concluded that if incorrect identifications were made as a result, they were not done so with ill intentions (Supreme Court of the United States 1990).

Conclusion

Despite Anne's persistence throughout the investigation and trial, the government maintained the claim that it had done all that it could, and the case closed with the court ruling in their favor. While Anne failed to make the military be held accountable for its misidentifications of Thomas and the other Pakse crew members, her lawsuit had monumental significance for the League and MIA/POW wives across the United States. Though Anne's decision to question the identification provided to her by the military and file the suit stemmed from a desire to pursue justice for her husband and family, her actions helped to shape a movement. By speaking out against the government, she challenged the widespread view of the submissive and unwaveringly loyal military wife, bringing this identity into the public's focus and redefining the traditional boundaries of this role. Anne's journey demonstrates that even women working within highly gendered institutions can defy conventional expectations.

Epilogue

Though the court ruled in favor of the government, CILHI was not yet off the hook for its misidentification of the Pakse crewmen. Anne's persistence and defiance had attracted the attention of the House of Representatives. On September 15, 1987, the Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives held a hearing about the future of CILHI (United States Congress House 1987). The subcommittee focused on the forensic anthropology team's evaluation of CILHI, as their report had brought attention to a variety of operational shortcomings (United States Congress House 1987). Drs. Maples, Kerley, and Lowell noted that while CILHI's staff appeared well-trained, the facilities and procedures needed improvement. Some of their recommendations included adopting scientifically accepted methods, appointing a board-certified forensic anthropologist as the director, increasing funding for equipment and facilities, and implementing a rigorous peer review process to ensure accurate identification (Hoshower 1999). The team suggested that CILHI consult with outside forensic anthropologists to confirm all identifications made by laboratory staff (1999). The subcommittee aimed to advance CILHI's position in the scientific community and increase public trust in the laboratory, and it encouraged CILHI to adopt these new procedures (United States Congress House 1987).

A 1992 operational report revealed that the laboratory had accepted all recommendations made by the evaluation team (United States Congress Senate). All identifications were now reviewed by CILHI's director, laboratory commander, and independent board-certified forensic anthropologists (Hoshower 1999). These reviewers could request more information or restart the identification process (Maples 1994). The government would then notify the family who could hire their own reviewer (1994). Finally, the Armed Forces Identification Review Board would review the identification, and if they approved, ASGRO would sign off (1994). These procedures aimed to prevent the misidentifications of servicemen like Thomas and ensure that what happened to Anne would not happen to anyone else.

Today, CILHI is known as the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) and is one of the top forensic anthropology laboratories in the world. DPAA staffs hundreds of personnel, is home to the largest forensic skeletal collection, and is the only nationally accredited forensic anthropology facility (Britzky 2022, ANSI National Accreditation Board 2024). Forensic anthropology textbooks today recognize CILHI's restructuring as a defining moment in the field, and Anne's willingness to challenge the government is an integral part of this history (Maples 1994). The laboratory has identified over 1800 missing American servicemen since 1976 and continues to uncover information about the fate of the thousands more that remain lost (Quigley 2014).

Though Anne lost her suit, she continued her work with the National League of Families, which remains a prominent figure in the POW/MIA issue. She volunteered at the Pensacola Veteran Center for over thirty years and formed connections with former servicemen to pay tribute to her husband (The Pensacola News Journal 2018). In November of 2016, DPAA positively identified Lt. Col. Thomas T. Hart III, and he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery (2018). Anne died the following year and was laid to rest next to her husband.

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Appendix A: Timeline

July 1954	The Geneva Accords create a cease-fire line along the 17th parallel, creating the communist state of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the democratic state of the Republic of Vietnam to the south.
1959	An unofficial war breaks out between North and South Vietnam.
August 1964	The United States fully enters the war after Northern Vietnamese boats attack two United States ships in the Gulf of Tonkin.
1965	President Lyndon B. Johnson issues the draft.
1966	POW and MIA wives on the West Coast of the United States organize as the League of Wives of American Vietnam Prisoners of War led by Sybil Stockdale.
1970	The League of Wives of American Vietnam Prisoners of War transitions into the National League of Wives of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia.
December 1972	Lieutenant Colonel Thomas T. Hart III's plane is shot down over North Vietnam.
March 1973	Anne joins her local branch of the National League of Families.
1976	The Central Identification Laboratory of Hawaii (CILHI) opens.
1977	The Army releases a letter to the Pakse families with new details about the crash scene, sparking hope that some of the servicemen may have survived the incident
September 1982	Anne visits the Pakse crash site with the National League of Families and finds several bone fragments which are sent to the Central Identification Laboratory of Hawaii (CILHI).
February 1985	A team from CILHI excavates the Pakse crash site and finds over 50,000 bone fragments.
July 1985	CILHI announces that it has identified all Pakse service men, including Lieutenant Colonel Thomas T. Hart III.

July 1985	Anne requests an independent examination of the remains by Dr. Michael Charney, and the results challenge CILHI's initial identifications.
December 1985	Drs. Maples, Kerley, and Levine are asked to evaluate CILHI's identifications and procedures.
June 1986	The military officially rescinds identifications of some Pakse crew members, including that of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas T. Hart III, and reopens their cases.
1986	Anne sues the United States of America for intentional infliction of emotional distress.
September 1987	The Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives holds a hearing about CILHI's future.
1992	CILHI accepts and implements recommendations for procedural improvements.
November 2016	DPAA positively identifies Lieutenant Colonel Thomas T. Hart III.
July 2017	Anne Hart passes away and is laid to rest near her husband in Arlington National Cemetery.

Appendix B: Anne Montgomery Hart and Lt. Col. Thomas T. Hart share a dance on their wedding day (circa 1960) (Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund).

Appendix C: Anne Montgomery Hart pictured with her children Kimberley, Thomas, Gillian, Heather, Joseph, and Hillary (Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund).