Senate Panel Hears Testimony Of Vietnam POW-MIA Families

By Thomas W. Lippman
THE WASHINGTON POST

For 23 years, Pat Plumadore of Syosset, N.Y., believed her husband had been captured by the North Vietnamese Army. The Marine Corps said so, explaining the absence of any news, but she never gave up, recovered, and was never to return home.

But last spring, out of the blue, the Pentagon told her that "highly reliable" intelligence had indicated Capt. Kenneth Plumadore was held by the North Vietnamese. She had been a prisoner since 1968 and identified his body in a Laotian hospital in May.

The story is part of a "tsunami of months' experience" at trying to learn the truth about relatives missing from the war, she said in a Senate committee Thursday, "and I am already 1 year old.

The testimony that Plumadore and other women gave to the Senate Select Committee on POW-MIA Affairs Thursday showed in raw, personal terms why the families of men who never came home from the nation's longest war remains such a volatile issue a generation later.

In voices raged with emotion, they told of being shrouded by uncertainty and deception, of being victimized by frauds and tormentors by unceasing threats of capture, and confirmed that they have the right to know and be heard. They spoke of the scene in the Senate's biggest hearing room was shared many times before, and showed why the committee's people have been asked the fates of the missing in more than a thousand hearings.

Relatives of some of the POW-MIA victims said they had been pushed out of their homes, barracks and businesses. They said the sensitivity of the POW-MIA's families are perhaps the best year of painful cases.

Each of the women has been through a different kind of unhappy story. Collectively, they have a strong warning to the committee and to the White House not to accept at face value Hanoi's promises to cooperate in the search for missing American soldiers.

Carol Hilditch of Wichita, Kan., is still waiting for news of her husband, Capt. John F. Hilditch, whose plane went down in Laos in 1965. She said the picture of him in custody of Pathet Lao communist troops, and he was a military prisoner of the U.S. from April 1966 to June 1973.

Last month, he said, he signed in captivity in 1967 and identified a historical burial site, but a Pentagon investigating team failed to find the site last April. He signed in April no longer.

"I have asked to see the Defense Intelligence Agency evidence that David had not survived, and they tell me there is no evidence to this day that he is not alive," she said. "If there is no evidence that these people are dead, why can't we make the assumption they are alive?"

Panel Approves Experimental Gene Therapy for Cystic Fibrosis

By Edwin Chien
THE WASHINGTON POST

A scientific panel gave its approval Thursday for experimental gene therapy treatments for cystic fibrosis patients. The decision was a milestone in the revolutionary but still-developing field of gene therapy. It came after years of controversy about whether the treatments should be tried against so prevalent and lethal a disease.

The panel's decision was a response to the American Thoracic Society's opposition to the use of gene therapy in cystic fibrosis patients. The panel's decision was based on the results of a study conducted by the National Institutes of Health, which showed that the treatment was safe and effective.

In the study, patients were given a gene that produces a protein called cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator (CFTR). The protein helps regulate the movement of sodium and chloride ions across cell membranes, which is necessary for the proper function of the lungs and other organs. The treatment was effective in correcting the genetic defect responsible for cystic fibrosis and improving lung function in some patients.

The decision was welcomed by researchers and patients' organizations, who had been pushing for the use of gene therapy in cystic fibrosis for years. The decision was the result of a long battle between the scientific community and the NIH, which had been hesitant to approve the use of gene therapy in human patients.

But the decision was also met with criticism by some experts, who argued that the treatment was not yet ready for widespread use. They said that more research was needed to fully understand the long-term effects of gene therapy and to ensure its safety.

The decision was a major step forward in the development of gene therapy treatments for cystic fibrosis and other genetic disorders. It was also a sign of the growing acceptance of gene therapy as a viable treatment option for patients with genetic diseases.