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## **Bush glimpses Vietnam war's unfinished business**

By Matt Spetalnick

HANOI (Reuters) - For all the talk of laying to rest the ghosts of a wartime past, President George W. Bush had a grim reminder on Saturday of some of America's unfinished business from the Vietnam war.

Taking a break from diplomacy on the second day of his trip to Vietnam, Bush visited the joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, where U.S. experts are working to find and identify the remains of American war dead.

It was only a brief stop for Bush, the second post-war U.S. president to visit Vietnam. Bush has made clear that rather than dwelling on old animosities, he wants to focus on Vietnam as an emerging trade partner and economic success story.

In keeping with that approach, Bush asked few questions of his military briefers as he moved briskly and almost without expression from one display to another in the courtyard of a two-storey colonial-style building housing the U.S. mission.

But the nature of their work was clear. Laid out before him was a rusted helmet, a dilapidated machine gun, a rotted combat boot and even plaster replicas of human bones investigators have unearthed at sights across Southeast Asia.

One officer told Bush how the Vietnamese military, once a deadly foe, now transports U.S. teams on giant Russian-made transport helicopters when they need to excavate remote sites.

Bush brought up the issue of MIAs, the official term for the more than 1,500 service members still listed as missing in action in Vietnam, with the country's Communist leaders in talks on Friday dominated by talk of trade and economics.

"He thanked the Vietnamese for strong cooperation," White House spokesman Tony Snow said.

### **TOP PRIORITY**

Accounting for America's missing from the war, in which some 58,000 Americans and three million Vietnamese died, has been a top priority of U.S. veterans' groups who have pressured successive post-war administrations.

Bill Clinton, who in 2000 became the first U.S. president to visit Vietnam, made Vietnamese help in the search a key condition for normalizing relations in 1995.

Bush's visit stood in sharp contrast to the trip by Clinton, a fellow baby boomer who never fought in Vietnam and focused his tour on healing old wounds.

Clinton was taken to a field near Hanoi where workers searched for a pilot shot down in 1967. Then he attended the ceremonial repatriation of the remains of several servicemen. He also met Vietnamese children maimed by some of the millions of land mines left over from decades of war.

Confronted with his own unpopular war in Iraq, Bush has tried to avoid such imagery in Vietnam.

But wherever he goes, Bush is shadowed by the ubiquitous image of revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh, who for many years to Americans was the face of the enemy, and as he left the MIA center his motorcade passed by Ho's temple-like tomb.

In a city like Hanoi, the old North Vietnamese capital struck regularly by U.S. bombers, the reminders of what is known in Vietnam as the American War are hard to avoid.