

10 March 2009

Statement by Donald C. Winter, Secretary of the Navy  
Regarding the Change in Status of Captain Michael Scott Speicher

Captain Michael Scott Speicher's F/A-18 was downed by hostile action over Iraq in January 1991, and he was declared KIA/BNR in May 1991. His status was changed in 2001 to MIA, and then from MIA to Missing/Captured in 2002 based on sighting reports in Iraq. Those sightings have since been discredited. In October 2008, the intelligence community concluded that Captain Speicher is deceased, though his remains are unlocated. Based on this assessment I directed the convening of a Status Review Board to consider whether Captain Speicher's status should remain Missing/Captured or be changed. This Status Review Board convened on 5 January 2009 and recommended that Captain Speicher's status should remain Missing/Captured.

As Secretary of the Navy, it is my responsibility to make a determination with respect to the status of Captain Speicher, which requires me to reconcile the intelligence community's assessment with the recommendation of the Status Review Board that rejects that assessment. In order to make a fully informed decision, I conducted a comprehensive review of all the information available to me, including the entire transcript of the Status Review Board and the Defense Intelligence Agency's briefs which were presented to the Status Review Board.

My review of the board proceedings and the compelling evidence presented by the intelligence community causes me great concern about the reliability of the board's recommendation, given their failure to employ a logical analytic process to their evaluation of the evidence in the intelligence assessment.

The board's recommendation is premised on the conclusion that Captain Speicher was alive upon landing in Iraq after ejecting from his aircraft. They base this on a statistical analysis of F/A-18 ejections; however that analysis was based solely on peacetime ejections, and not the combat environment in which this ejection occurred. They also chose to ignore the lack of any parachute sighting, emergency beacon transmission or survival radio transmissions.

Given the current state of U.S. presence and access to the territory of Iraq, and the discrediting of all intelligence sources who previously claimed to have seen Captain Speicher in captivity, there is currently no credible evidence that Captain Speicher is "captured." For Captain Speicher to be in captivity today one would have to accept a massive conspiracy of silence and perfectly executed deception that has lasted for over 18 years and that continues today.

Consequently, I cannot support the recommendation of the Status Review Board. However, in the abundance of caution, and in the absence of a board report on which I can rely; I determine that Captain Speicher's status should be changed to "Missing in Action." I believe another Status Review Board is warranted and that that board should conduct a de novo review of the evidence in this case given the fundamental problems identified with this board's process. Accordingly, I strongly recommend that the Department of the Navy reconsider this matter not later than 12 months from the date of this memorandum.

The Navy appreciates the challenges Captain Speicher's family has faced these past 18 years. Captain Speicher is an American hero and bringing him home to his family and his country will remain a top priority for the Navy and the Nation.