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Unclaimed: Controversy erupts over man claiming to be missing Vietnam veteran

But documentary filmmaker Michael Jorgensen stands by his film, as does the American family of John Hartley Robertson.



VINCE TALOTTA / TORONTO STAR

"I don't need to be convinced one way or another," Unclaimed director Michael Jorgensen told the Star Wednesday.

By: Linda Barnard Movies, Published on Thu May 02 2013

Controversy surrounding [Unclaimed](#), a Canadian documentary about the quest to reunite a MIA soldier with his family after he was believed found alive in Vietnam, has intensified with the U.S. military declaring him a fraud.

A [Department of Defense PoW/Missing Personnel Office](#) statement issued Wednesday afternoon says fingerprints taken in 2009 do not match Robertson's on-file prints and DNA did not match family samples ([view documents](#)). The family has said they have never submitted DNA samples.

Meanwhile, the GI Film Festival in Washington, D.C., which will screen Edmonton director [Michael Jorgensen](#)'s film May 12 following its world premiere at Toronto's [Hot Docs](#), has posted a [disclaimer](#) on its website. It links to [another photocopied government document](#), also obtained by the Star, dated 2009 and detailing fraudulent claims.

The GI film fest will still screen the film.

"Whether fact or fiction, *Unclaimed* is a fascinating story about a Vietnam veteran, Tom Faunce, who

dedicates himself to bringing home someone he believes to be an American GI left behind,” the statement reads.

The online world has been buzzing since the story was first reported last week in [the Star](#) , of a soldier supposedly left behind for 44 years, who no longer speaks a word of English. It was subsequently followed by media around the world, spurring passionate debate among PoW/MIA groups and veterans.

An emotional audience gave *Unclaimed* a standing ovation at its [world premiere](#) on Tuesday. (It screens again on Thursday and Saturday.)

But nothing has changed for Jorgensen. Nor has it altered the feelings of Robertson’s family, seen in the film’s climax having a tear-filled reunion in Edmonton with the man they say is Robertson after Faunce made repeated trips to Vietnam to make good on his vow to leave no man behind.

“I don’t need to be convinced one way or another,” Jorgensen told the Star on Wednesday. He has repeatedly said in interviews it doesn’t matter what he thinks; it’s the family who is convinced the man is genuine.

“The government has claimed since 2009 and earlier that this guy has been a fraud and they have been investigating as early as 1991, and to my knowledge, the family has never been contacted by the family and never been told about it,” said Jorgensen.

The man claiming to be Robertson said he married the Vietnamese woman who nursed him back to health after years of being held captive and tortured in the jungle by the North Vietnamese Army. He took the name of his Vietnamese wife’s dead husband, Dang Tan Ngoc.

Dramatic onscreen proof of his nationality is obtained in *Unclaimed* , establishing him as American-born.

Eighty-year-old Jean Robertson-Holley believes the man is indeed her missing brother “Johnny” after seeing him again 44 years after his helicopter crashed while on a covert mission in Laos on May 20, 1968.

Fellow serviceman Ed Mahoney, whom the documentary follows to Vietnam to meet the man claiming to be his former mentor, is also convinced the man is Robertson. He knew him on sight.

Jorgensen added that people need to see *Unclaimed* before passing judgment.

“People are getting really spun up about something they didn’t see,” he said. “I have never made the assertion it is him. It is Tom Faunce who believes he is a serviceman and finds his family and gets them together. And they all believe it is their loved one.”

Hot Docs’ executive director Chris McDonald said the festival is proud to host the world premiere of *Unclaimed* .

“We selected the film aware that it raises many difficult and unanswered questions, which are made that much more challenging with the news being reported today,” McDonald told the Star via email. “But we trust our audiences will approach the film with open minds and an appreciation of the complexities of this

truly unique story.”

View Defense Department statement

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