

# Cover-up on MIAs is denied

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WASHINGTON — Reagan administration officials asserted yesterday that allegations of a government cover-up on whether Americans are still captive in Vietnam are "specious, absurd and insulting."

State and Defense Department officials told a Senate committee that such charges are the result of activists' "drawing conclusions" from inadequate information while exploiting the emotionally charged issue.

"There can be no cover-up; the President would not countenance it," Richard Armitage, assistant defense secretary, told the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Air Force Gen. Leonard H. Perroots, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said investigations by the House Intelligence Committee, the Pentagon inspector general and a congressional task force have demonstrated that the cover-up allegations "have no basis in fact."

Perroots then responded to specific comments made in Senate hearings in January by two retired Green Berets — Maj. Mark Smith and First Sgt. Melvin C. McIntire — who sued in federal court in Fayetteville, N.C., in September.

The lawsuit has drawn supporting depositions from across the country from people who contend that they have information, ignored by the government, about everything from individual American servicemen being held captive to the existence of slave-labor gangs working in remote areas of Laos.

Perroots said that during interviews with his agency, McIntire said that all his information came from Smith, and that Smith failed to provide any information to back up his public contentions about having 200 photographs of prisoners and a videotape that shows 39 American prisoners.

"There's no cover-up in this agency — certainly not now," said Perroots, who took over the intelligence agency five months ago. "I'll open up any of my files for Congress."

The divisiveness of the issue and the difficulty of assessing information about POWs was illustrated when the panel members themselves quarreled over the value of the testimony they have received so far.

Chairman Frank Murkowski (R., Alaska) said that in the three hearings the panel has conducted in both open and closed sessions since returning from Vietnam in January, it has received no first-hand accounts from people who have actually seen American prisoners.

But the ranking Democrat, Sen. Dennis DeConcini (D., Ariz.), said that he believed that such testimony had been presented.

Armitage said that two days of talks between U.S. and Vietnamese officials that began yesterday in Hanoi and were aimed at getting the Vietnamese to increase their cooperation in resolving live-sighting reports and giving the United States a full accounting for the 2,441 Americans still listed as missing in action in Indochina.