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KYODO: JAPANESE SAYS U.S. POW'S SEEN IN SRV IN 1988

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[TEXT] TOKYO, JUNE 7 KYODO -- A FORMER JAPANESE DETAINEE IN VIETNAM SAID WEDNESDAY FIVE OR SIX AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR (POWS) WERE STILL IN CAPTIVITY WHEN HE LEFT THE COUNTRY LAST JANUARY.

IWANOBU YOSHIDA, 65, A BUDDHIST MONK, TOLD KYODO NEWS SERVICE THAT THERE WERE ABOUT 10 AMERICAN POWS WHEN HE WAS FIRST DETAINED IN VIETNAM AS A POLITICAL PRISONER IN 1975.

YOSHIDA, WHO IS NOW HOSPITALIZED IN SAPPORO, SAID THEY WERE BEING FORCED TO ENGAGE IN CONSTRUCTION WORK.

U.S. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS RECEIVED THE SAME INFORMATION IN TOKYO FROM YOSHIDA'S ELDEST DAUGHTER, KEIKO TAKATSUKA, 37.

"THE REPORTS ARE NOT UNBELIEVABLE. THERE IS NO REASON TO DOUBT HER STORY AND HER ATTITUDE," SAID A U.S. OFFICIAL WHO DECLINED TO BE NAMED.

Jeez!

"WE'LL SEND ALL REPORTS AND MATERIALS TO THE U.S. TO BE STUDIED BY EXPERTS. WE WILL NOT ASSESS OR VERIFY THE REPORTS HERE, THOUGH THEY ARE VERY INTERESTING," THE OFFICIAL SAID.

TAKATSUKA QUOTED YOSHIDA AS SAYING HE SPENT THE LAST SEVEN YEARS IN A HANOI PRISON, WHERE THE POWS SPOKE ENGLISH AND CALLED HIM "JAP."

THE FOREIGN DETAINEES WERE CALLED AMERICANS BY VIETNAMESE POLITICAL PRISONERS THERE. ONE OF THEM HELPED YOSHIDA WALK ON DISCOVERING HE HAD LEG TROUBLE, TAKATSUKA SAID.

YOSHIDA, A POLITICIAN TURNED BUDDHIST PRIEST, EMIGRATED TO VIETNAM IN 1966 AND WAS GRANTED CITIZENSHIP BY THE THEN GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM IN 1973. HE WAS DETAINED AS A POLITICAL PRISONER AFTER THE FALL OF SOUTH VIETNAM IN 1975 AND SPENT MORE THAN 13 YEARS IN CAPTIVITY. HE RETURNED TO JAPAN LAST JANUARY.

THE VIETNAMESE EMBASSY IN TOKYO REFUTED YOSHIDA'S REMARKS AND SAID THAT AS THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT HAS REPEATEDLY STATED IN THE PAST, THERE ARE NO AMERICAN SOLDIERS LIVING IN THE COUNTRY.

EMBASSY OFFICIALS SAID THEY HAVE NEVER HEARD THAT AMERICAN POWS ARE STILL BEING HELD IN VIETNAM.

THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS INSISTED ON THE POSSIBILITY THAT AMERICAN WAR PRISONERS ARE STILL BEING DETAINED IN VIETNAM AND HAS DEMANDED HANOI PROVIDE INFORMATION CONCERNING AMERICAN POWS.

YOSHIDA SAID HE HAS NO DETAILS ABOUT THE AMERICAN PRISONERS BECAUSE THEY WERE DETAINED IN A SEPARATE BUILDING.

HE SAID HE WAS NOT IN DIRECT VERBAL CONTACT WITH THE AMERICANS BECAUSE HE COULD NOT SPEAK ENGLISH.

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