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Concatenated JPRS Reports, 1992

Document 5 of 15

Page 1

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED Status: [STAT]
 Report Number: FBIS-USR-92-003-L UDC Number:
 Report Volume:

Dissemination: FOUO

Headline: U.S. Concern Over Vietnam-Era MIA's Viewed

Source Line: 924C0786A Moscow EKHO PLANETY in Russian No 40, 1-4 Oct
 91 [signed to press 25 Sep 91] pp 20-22-FOR OFFICIAL
 USE ONLY

FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE:

1. [Article by Stanislav Lunev: 'Awaiting Word From Those Who Have Disappeared...']

2. [Text] Washington-There is a bitter after taste to this almost classic 'photograph episode.' In mid-July, the director of the Institute for Defense Research in Alexandria, Virginia, and several families of officers missing in action received a very indistinct, fuzzy photograph picturing, it was conjectured, three former U.S. Air Force pilots shot down over jungles during the war in Vietnam. The snapshot seemed recent. Could it really be that American citizens were still going round in the circles of a 'communist hell' somewhere in 'bamboo cages' of the Viet Cong? For several days all of America was agitated. Many foreign newspapers, including ours, reported the news. Soon Pentagon experts provided clarification of the situation-the photo was a 'forgery.' Additional details of the fabrication have presently come to light.

3. The original information posed more questions than it answered. The three men in the photo, getting on in years, stood against a background of some kind of undergrowth holding a large piece of cardboard in their hands with a series of letters not understood. Only the date-25 May 1990-could be deciphered without any particular difficulty. Nonetheless, the United States mass media hastened to report that this was a photo of American servicemen who, from all appearances, were taken prisoner by Vietnamese troops and held many long years in concentration camps in territory of Indochina. It was surmised that today they might be found somewhere in Cambodia.

4. Specifically reported were the names of Air Force Colonel John Robertson, shot down over Vietnam 16 September 1966, Air Force Major Albro Landi, reported missing 24 December 1970, and Naval Air Lieutenant Larry Stevens, who never returned from a mission 14 February 1969.

5. Practically no one had any doubt that the three named U.S.

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FOUO

Concatenated JPRS Reports, 1992

Document 5 of 15

Page 2

citizens—if they were alive, of course—were being held in a country in Indochina against their will. Therefore, an avalanche of demands, recommendations, and proposals came crashing down upon the Pentagon, the White House, and President Bush personally from society, in the first place from veterans organizations, newspapers, radio and television. Their main idea was to undertake immediate measures to free the former pilots and not take any steps towards normalizing relations either with Vietnam or with any other states of Indochina, until such time as the fate of Americans missing in action during the years of the war was fully cleared up.

6. American society is distinguished by a heightened sensitivity to the problem of its citizens disappearing without a trace during combat operations and wars. An established abbreviation exists to designate the latter—'MIA'—taken from the initial letters of the phrase 'Missing in Action,' which brings to mind painful pages in the country's modern history. An effort to provide a full explanation of the circumstances of disappearance or death of persons listed as missing in action on the territory of foreign states while performing their official duties—is demanded of the American Government by appropriate laws, as well as by public opinion.

7. Concern for fellow countrymen who get entangled in difficult situations was strikingly manifest during the final stage of the recent operation 'Desert Storm.' American servicemen who spent time in Iraqi captivity returned to the United States as national heroes. Honors and acknowledgements of gratitude were bestowed on them by the population and leadership of the country the likes of which were not conferred either upon the commander of troops of the Multinational Forces in the Persian Gulf, General Norman Schwarzkopf, or upon the commander in chief of the United States Armed Forces, President George Bush. Each of them was received in the White House where, in a solemn ceremony, the head of the administration conferred on them, in addition to other awards for valor and distinguished combat service, the esteemed 'Former Prisoner of War Medal,' highly respected in the country.

8. The problem of persons missing in action also has a serious material side. A certain U.S. Army colonel working in the Pentagon's press section graciously agreed to talk about it. At his request, I do not provide his name. According to this senior officer, the families of American servicemen who are missing in action are paid a monetary allowance from the moment of their disappearance. The amount of the assistance is not great, but for many it constitutes the main source of income. However, if the serviceman missing in action is discovered after a certain length of time and it turns out he is alive, he is compensated a significant portion of his salary. 'But' if documents establish that an MIA perished, or his remains are

FOUO
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found," the colonel continued, "a portion of his salary is paid to his relatives from the time of death." And a certain rule operates in the Pentagon, well known to all, regarding information on persons missing in action. The U.S. Department of Defense has established special prize money--up to a million dollars--for information which might provide actual assistance to officials in clearing up the fate of MIA's. The colonel is convinced that it is precisely interest in such a large monetary award which explains to a great extent the regular appearance in the U.S. mass media of pseudosensational material concerning another "discovery" of Americans who disappeared during the Vietnam War years. Assertions are even made from time to time that some of those who disappeared "are in the Soviet Union," where they were allegedly interned after being brought out of areas of combat operations.

9. Incidentally, practically every year over Memorial Day, a widely observed holiday in the United States, groups of motorcyclist-activists of right-wing veterans' organizations parade down the streets of the American capital and, without fail, past the USSR Embassy building on 16th Street. These people sincerely believe that several hundred American servicemen taken prisoner in Indochina during the war years "are forcibly being held in the USSR" to this very day.

10. The July photo of three "missing persons" elicited an explosion of interest. But Pentagon officials have reacted in a fashion far more restrained from the very beginning. The fact of the matter, as the colonel from the press section explained, is that such photos are not a rarity for experts. Military archives already contain several hundred.

11. Getting down to their conduct of a thorough investigation of this case, military specialists surmised that severe disappointment would befall the relatives of John Robertson, Albro Landi, and Larry Stevens. And that is the way things turned out.

12. U.S. Defense Department specialists, including military intelligence personnel, as official Pentagon representative Pete Williams informed later, "worked" in the territory of several countries of Indochina and were able to uncover the "original source" of a whole series of photographs of "missing persons" appearing in the U.S. mass media. This turned out to be...the Soviet Cultural Center library in the Cambodian capital where anyone who so desires may obtain Soviet periodicals. Photo portraits of "American servicemen" were made from illustrations in one of these--the magazine SOVETSKIY SOYUZ.

13. In analyzing photos sent to the Institute for Defense Research

UNCLASSIFIED
FOUO

Concatenated JPRS Reports, 1992

Document 5 of 15

Page 4

and other similar photos of recent times, Pentagon experts arrived at the opinion that the facial features of the people depicted on them were more characteristic of the Slavic peoples of Russia and did not correspond to Western European types.

14. In this connection, members of the investigative group of officers working in the U.S. Embassy in Thailand were directed, in addition to other tasks, to try to find the location on the territory of Cambodia, and most likely- in Phnom Penh, where it would be possible to obtain Soviet periodicals. They came fairly quickly to the library of the Soviet Cultural Center. Upon obtaining the Pentagon photographs, library employees found the originals almost immediately in the magazine SOVETSKIY SOYUZ. Appearing in the photographs presented to American investigators were Soviet construction workers, a metalworker, baker, and other workers with the most peaceable specialties. The first photos were made from these; then Xerox copies were produced which, after repeated copying, came to resemble photographs of people taken by an almost concealed camera under conditions of extraordinary secrecy "against a background of impenetrable jungle deep inside Indochina."

15. One detail of no small importance: The person who made the copies from the magazine illustrations apparently failed to presume the existence of any facial "nuances" among people of various nationalities of the planet's white population. For him, all white people obviously "have the same face."

16. "What scoundrel manufactured and distributed these photographs?" journalists asked the Pentagon representative.

17. And although American reporters are famous for their sharp inquisitiveness if not their impertinence, they did not manage to get a precise answer from the Defense Department official. Citing the Department of Defense tradition of "not commenting on intelligence information," P. Williams refused to name the source of the photographs. He also would not confirm or deny press reports that they were delivered to the United States by some mythical "businessman from Cambodia," who was ruined by the Pol Pot regime and the "Vietnamese political advisers" actually running the country.

18. Additional information on the efforts of American experts in the countries of Indochina to try to determine the fate of U.S. servicemen missing in action was reported by the CBS television company in one of its reports from Hanoi. Included in their number, in addition to military intelligence personnel, were several prominent pathologists from the hospital at the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, who specialize in the identification of human

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remains. Based on the testimony of eyewitnesses, the American specialists were able to establish the precise location of impact of Colonel Robertson's plane near a hamlet not far from the Vietnamese capital. They took numerous soil samples to determine the possibility of finding human remains in this locality. The results obtained were inconsistent and could not provide any basis for a conclusion as to the death of the pilot along with destruction of his plane. The residents of surrounding villages and Vietnamese officials insist on their version, however, according to which the life of J. Robertson was terminated when his plane fell to the ground, i.e., on 16 September 1966. And so the colonel's fate remains a mystery. Strictly speaking, insofar as the fact of his death is not confirmed in documentation, there remains the theoretical possibility that 25 years ago he managed to save himself and vanished into the jungle.

19. [Begin box] Soldiers and Officers of the United States Armed Forces Listed as Missing;

20. In Vietnam-2,273

21. In Korea-8,000

22. In the Second World War-79,000

23. (Data of the United States Department of Defense) [end box]

24. Reaction of the American community to the photographic forgery was extremely acute and painful. I will cite just one comment, one of the most typical, made by authoritative American congressman Stephen Solarz, a Republican who represents the state of New York on Capitol Hill. He publicly promised to do everything in his power to find out the name of the person "who so coarsely violated the feelings of people who for decades have been waiting for their missing-in-action relatives and loved ones."

25. By decision of President G. Bush, 20 September was declared Former American Prisoners of War Day. On that day the entire nation expressed its gratitude and appreciation to the soldiers and officers who endured the horrors of being held prisoner, honored the memory of those who perished in captivity, and kept its hopes alive that someone among those who disappeared might return. Above the White House fluttered the black and white flag of the National League of Families of Prisoners of War and Missing in Action. Such flags, whose colors symbolize sorrow and hope, were raised over all official buildings of the American capital. Solemn memorial ceremonies were conducted by American state authorities.

26. The presidential declaration emphasizes that the United States

UNCLASSIFIED
FOUO

Document 5 of 15 Concatenated JPRS Reports, 1992

Page 6

will do "everything possible and even the impossible" to clear up the fate of all its soldiers, sailors, and officers missing in action, and bring home those who may be being held prisoner today.

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