



NATIONAL LEAGUE OF FAMILIES
OF AMERICAN PRISONERS AND MISSING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Report on Defense Department Briefing

August 11, 1977, League Board member Sara Frances Shay and League Executive Director Carol Bates were briefed by Lt. Col. C.M. Matthews, USA who was accompanied by Capt. Raymond Vohden, USN and Capt. Mary Cochran, USAF. The briefing was based upon the script and visual materials which were presented to the members of the Woodcock Commission prior to their trip to Hanoi in March, 1977.

Following is the substance of the briefing:

The beginning gives an outline of the POW/MIA situation, including the number of men returned in 1973 and says that 2,546 men remain unaccounted for at this time. This includes men who are still listed as prisoner of war, missing-in-action or killed-in-action - body not recovered.

The primary thrust of the briefing appears to be to point out the fact that the Communists, and specifically the Vietnamese, do have information on a number of the unaccounted for Americans, and should be able to provide such information to the United States.

The Defense Department has placed the missing men in five categories according to the likelihood the Vietnamese will have information on a man. It should be noted here that for these purposes the terms "information" and "accounting" do not necessarily mean that the Communists will be able to provide the remains of the man, but they will provide information as to the fate of specific individuals.

Category #1 - Confirmed - If a man is placed in this category it is because the Communists identified him by name stating he was captured; they have photos taken of the man; or through other intelligence which confirms his fate. An example used was a photo taken of a man in captivity which was subsequently published in a French magazine. There are 179 men in Category #1.

Category #2 - Suspected Knowledge - Persons in this category may include persons involved in the same incidents as men in category #1; where there is intelligence leading the military services to believe it is probable the Communists have information; and where the man was lost in an area where it is reasonable to presume the Communists would have information. An example cited in the briefing was a man who ejected from his plane over the water. Other aircraft were seen; his chute and numerous small boats in the area. Later a Hanoi radio broadcast announced they had captured a pilot, and although he was not mentioned by name, only one man was lost that day. Further intelligence available to the U.S. confirms the pilot's capture. There are 1160 men in Category #2.

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Category #3 - Doubtful - Men in this category were lost under circumstances where the United States has little, if any, information about the loss. An example used was of a man who was on his way from the shore to his ship and never made the ship. Search planes found wreckage, but did not see an oil slick in the water. There are 344 men in Category #3.

Category #4 - Unknown - Men in this category were lost at locations which are unknown to the United States. An example used in the briefing is of a man who was on a solo reconnaissance mission and lost radio contact with the base. There are 428 men in Category #4.

Category #5 - Unrelated - Non-recoverable - Persons in this category have been determined to be unrecoverable, based upon information available to the United States. It should be noted, however, that in two recent instances the Vietnamese have returned remains of men which the Department of Defense thought to be non-recoverable. There are 436 men in Category #5.

The remainder of the briefing was devoted to showing examples illustrating information the U.S. has, indicating that the Communists are capable of accounting for a number of the 2500 men. Such examples included photos of the men which were taken by the Communists, showing dead pilots next to the wreckage of their planes, men lying on the ground, photos of a grave with an American name on it, announcements of captured pilots with photos of the men's identification cards, etc.

Lt. Col. Matthews told Mrs. Shay and me that these sample cases were just a few of many where it is known the Vietnamese have information. He went on to say that it is "reasonable to expect an accounting can be made for the men in categories one and two." (This is a total of 1339 men, yet to date the U.S. has only received an accounting for 23 of 55 men who the Vietnamese say died in captivity, plus the return of the remains of another 14 men.)

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