

EXPOSING A P.O.W. HOAX

For the family of Donald Carr, a missing Vietnam War serviceman, the new photo seemed a dream come true

BY SUSAN KATZ KEATING

"DONALD CARR did not die in Vietnam. He is alive, and I can prove it."

To the Carr family of East Chicago, Ind., those words from P.O.W. hunter Jack Bailey stoked a dream that for 20 years had never quite died—Army Capt. Donald Gene Carr would one

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day return from Southeast Asia. Carr, a much-decorated Green Beret, had embarked on a secret mission aboard a Bronco aircraft on July 6, 1971. He and his pilot were monitoring North Vietnamese troop movements. From over the assigned site in the jungles of Laos, they radioed that they would wait for the weather to clear. They were never heard from again, listed as Missing in Action.

Five years later, with the war over,

there was still no word of Carr. His status was reclassified as Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered.

Then, in 1991, retired Air Force Lt. Col. Jack Bailey appeared. Associates of Bailey showed the Carr family what they described as recent photos of a middle-aged Caucasian held captive in Laos. Matthew Carr, a brother of the missing man, studied the pictures of a man in a blue polo shirt, then exclaimed excitedly, "That's Don. I'm positive!"

Bailey said the pictures had been taken in February 1990 by a Laotian contact. He claimed to have given the photographer the blue polo shirt to be worn by the P.O.W. as evidence the pictures were recent and genuine.

To be certain, Carr's former wife, Carol Collins, provided a close-up of Don taken in 1961. The pictures were forwarded to forensics expert Dr. Michael Charney of Colorado State University, who concluded that the man in the recent photo was indeed Donald Carr.

The photographs had explosive implications—the first hard evidence that U.S. prisoners remained in Southeast Asia after the war and that some, incredibly, were still alive. Bailey called a press conference to reveal his discovery.

The announcement became a major news story. The Carr photo was featured in the national media. The Washington *Times* ran an editorial saying the circumstances of the Carr photo "lend credence to its possible authenticity."

But to the Pentagon's Defense

Intelligence Agency (DIA), which keeps tabs on M.I.A. cases, something did not sit right. That something was Jack Bailey. The DIA knew him as one of many hoaxers who routinely produce phony evidence on P.O.W.s and M.I.A.s.

False Credentials. Bailey presents himself as a champion of the oppressed, "a reminder that there are still heroes." He claims to be "one of the highest-decorated American fighting men of any war."

According to his own publicity material, his career sounds illustrious indeed. He served in World War II and then Korea "as a jet fighter pilot." He later did two tours in Vietnam, flying 256 combat missions. As a pioneering aviator he broke world speed and altitude records. He says he retired as the commander of Langley Air Force Base near Hampton, Va., headquarters of the Tactical Air Command.

Bailey boasts he is one of only two Americans to have earned Korea's presidential citation for the defense of that land. He claims he earned two Purple Hearts for wounds received in action. On display in his Garden Grove, Calif., home is the Silver Star, one of the military's highest honors.

Military records and other evidence tell a different story. In his testimony before the U.S. Senate Select Committee on P.O.W./M.I.A. Affairs, Bailey acknowledged he did not serve overseas during the Korean War, much less fly in combat. He did only one tour in Vietnam, where

he served with a combat support group, making sure fighter planes were in good working order and investigating accidents and crashes. He never served as commander of Langley Air Force Base.

Bailey earned one Purple Heart, not two, and the Korean presidential citation was "The Order of National Security Merit, Fourth Class," which he won in 1968. There was no Silver Star. The National Aeronautic Association says there is no documentation that Bailey ever set any aviation record.

Amid the tall tales, a few things are certain. Bailey retired from the Air Force in 1969. In the early 1980s, he acquired a rusted old smuggling ship, the *Akuna III*, and set up in the rescue business in the South China Sea. In fund-raising appeals for his "Operation Rescue" (no connection to the anti-abortion group), Bailey claimed the unarmed *Akuna* would prevent pirate attacks on boat people fleeing communism in Vietnam and Cambodia. Due to immigration laws, he claimed, he would be unable to take on refugees, but he could give them food, medicine and protection. For this he needed a minimum of \$18,000 per month.

Bailey took observers on a rescue mission so they could see for themselves the dangerous humanitarian work he performed. The trip was a disaster. The *Akuna* was in such disrepair that it broke down at sea and had to be towed back. The medical supplies Bailey brought to treat refugees were so old and poorly

stored as to be potentially dangerous, one witness reported.

Bailey recalls that during the voyage the ship neared an island ablaze with gunfire. Pirates were shooting innocent people. Bailey declares: "I went ashore and told the pirates, 'Give me your guns. Don't shoot any more people.' They gave me the guns."

Others on board say there were no pirates and no gun battles. "It is interesting Bailey would tell such a story when eyewitnesses can say it is false," says Robert K. Brown, a passenger and the publisher of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine.

Brown and others concluded that Bailey had misrepresented himself. Bailey maintained the trip showed that Operation Rescue was in dire need of donations. He continued his fund-raising pleas, but now he focused on the P.O.W. issue.

Pig Bones. Bailey claimed to have heard numerous reports from the boat people of live American P.O.W.s in Southeast Asia. He used the "sightings" for dramatic fund-raising letters. In one mass mailing, he wrote: "On a back road in communist Vietnam, a visiting Swedish businessman spots a chain gang of tall American men—nothing but skin and bones, with open sores. One of these slave laborers calls out in English, 'Tell the world about us.'"

In 1984, Bailey approached U.S. officials in Bangkok with what he said were the remains of American P.O.W.s. Medical examiners determined the skeletal fragments were a combination of pig bones and

human bones belonging to persons no taller than five feet. Three years later, Bailey again produced what he said were the remains of an American serviceman; the bones turned out to be those of an Asian woman. Still, Bailey kept them wrapped in an American flag and displayed them during fund-raising speeches.

In 1991, when Bailey went public with the "Captain Carr" photo, the DIA recognized the picture. "Captain Carr" was the same man Bailey had called "Major X" in an earlier fund-raising appeal. That fund-raiser had another "P.O.W." photo, which turned out to be a man who had never even been taken captive.

Nicholas Cain, a Los Angeles private investigator, also recognized the "Carr" pictures. According to Cain, Bailey had showed them to him in 1989, several months before Bailey now claimed they were taken.

Cain says he and Bailey had teamed to make a documentary about communist troops along the Thai-Cambodian border. Instead, they ended up on the Thai-Burmese border where, Cain recalls, Bailey proposed making a fund-raising film for Operation Rescue. Bailey wanted to claim they were on the Laotian-Vietnamese border, close to a secret P.O.W. camp. When Cain refused, he remembers Bailey arguing: "It looks a lot like Vietnam. No one will know the difference." Cain later told the DIA, "I knew the difference and refused to cooperate with his scam." (Bailey denies Cain's account.)

Looking for "Mr. X." Meanwhile, spurred on by Bailey's claims, members of the Carr family threw themselves into the search for Don. Karen Miller, a cousin whose family helped raise Don, quit her teaching job in Indiana and moved to the Washington, D.C., area to dig for clues full time. Kenneth Carr, Donald's brother, spent 2½ months in Southeast Asia on a failed P.O.W. rescue operation. Collins, Carr's former wife, took an unpaid leave of absence from her job as an airline sales representative and spent nearly six months looking for him. She flew to Bailey's California home hoping for more information. "I have no trouble asking direct questions," Collins said, "but I couldn't get a straight answer from him."

Bailey did tell Collins he was on his way to Thailand, where he would arrange to meet the imprisoned Carr. Despite Bailey's objections, Collins insisted on going along. The trip yielded only fruitless meetings with shady characters. "It was a wild-goose chase," Collins says. "I came home more disillusioned than ever."

Over the next several months, Bailey provided the Pentagon with details about "secret P.O.W. camps" in Laos. He wove a complicated tale of how he came by the Carr pictures, claiming to have had help from a mysterious "Mr. X" in Thailand.

Then-Defense Secretary Dick Cheney dispatched a high-level team to meet with Bailey and Mr. X in Bangkok, but Mr. X was nowhere to be found. Later, Bailey admitted he had lied about the location of

camps, stating he didn't trust the Pentagon's motives. Then Operation Rescue sent out another fundraising appeal, featuring the Carr photo, this time claiming—falsely—that the Pentagon had authenticated the Carr picture.

In 1992, the DIA identified the man in the Carr photo as Guenter Dittrich, a German national who had been arrested on a bird smuggling charge. When Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.) asked the Justice Department to investigate Bailey's activities, Bailey argued there was a government conspiracy at work—and Dittrich might in fact be a brainwashed Donald Carr.

"We'd Been Had." Feeling she had been "jerked around too long by Jack Bailey," Collins decided to

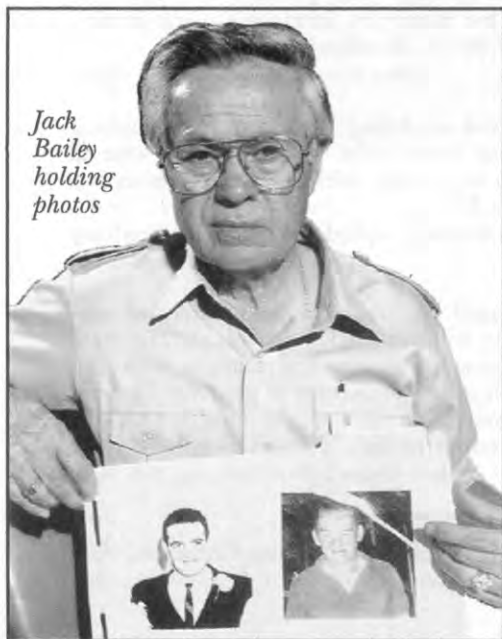
go see Dittrich for herself. She was joined on the trip by Norm Turner, a California judge and former fighter pilot who had become involved in the hunt for Donald Carr. With the help of a private detective, they found Dittrich in Frankfurt, Germany, where he was awaiting trial on the bird-smuggling charge.

Dittrich told them he was the man in the photos, which had been taken near the cages of a bird export company in Bangkok years before. What's more, Dittrich said the blue polo shirt he was wearing in the pictures was his own; no one had given it to him, as Bailey had claimed. "We'd all been had," Collins said.

Turner took photographs of Dittrich and turned them over to Dr. Charney. The forensics expert concluded that it was Dittrich, not Carr, who appeared in Bailey's photos.

Bailey still insists he provided the shirt Dittrich wore, though he concedes the man in the pictures is probably not Carr. He says the Dittrich episode was part of a vast government plot designed to discredit him, and that Carr might still be alive. "There's no telling what these government people will do next," Bailey says. "I'm not guilty of fraud and the things they're insinuating."

For the past year, the FBI has reportedly been investigating Bailey and the finances of his tax-exempt Operation Rescue. That organization is said



READER'S DIGEST

to have taken in nearly \$3.2 million from 1982 to 1991, the last year for which Bailey filed. A federal grand jury in Alexandria, Va., is also investigating Bailey's Operation Rescue.

The spadework is tricky, since Bailey does not bilk families outright. Instead, says Collins, "he uses the emotional appeal of one family to solicit funds from others." One thing is known: very little of the millions raked in by Operation Rescue has actually gone toward finding P.O.W.s or helping refugees. According to figures filed with the Inter-

nal Revenue Service and the California Attorney General, the vast bulk of Operation Rescue's money went to fund-raising expenses.

JACK BAILEY is a con man who has little regard for truth. His fabrications divert investigators from pursuing genuine leads, cost people thousands of dollars and tear apart the lives of family members. Carol Collins will never forget the price she paid for listening to Bailey.

"The marrow was sucked out of my bones," she said.