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ADMINISTRATIVE MESSAGE

ROUTINE

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SUBJ/INTERVIEW OF REQUESTED SOURCE, NGUYEN NGOC SON//

REF/A/FAX/DET 2/16MAY93//

AMPN/SUBJ: LIST OF PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW, ENTRY NUMBER 28 OF 83//

RMKS/1. BACKGROUND. ON 16 AUG 93, A JOINT U.S./VIETNAM ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW TEAM INTERVIEWED RETIRED SENIOR COLONEL (SRCOL) NGUYEN NGOC SON, A 70 YEAR OLD DONG KY DISTRICT SEAT, BAC THAI PROVINCE RESIDENT. SRCOL SON WAS FORMERLY THE PAVN 968TH DIVISION (DIV) POLITICAL OFFICER. THE TEAM MET AT THE THAI NGUYEN HOTEL, THAI NGUYEN TOWNSHIP, BAC THAI PROVINCE, TO INTERVIEW SRCOL SON, A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF INFORMATION CONCERNING U.S. PERSONNEL MISSING IN ACTION (MIA) IN VIETNAM. THE U.S. CONTINGENT CONSISTED OF TSGT [redacted], JOINT TASK FORCE-FULL ACCOUNTING (JTF-FA) ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM COORDINATOR; AND P02 [redacted], JTF-FA ANALYST/ LINGUIST. THE VIETNAMESE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT CONTINGENT CONSISTED OF LTC LE KY, MINISTRY OF DEFENSE; AND MR. NGUYEN VAN THANG LOI, MINISTRY OF INTERIOR. SRCOL SON HAD NOT BEEN INTERVIEWED BY A JOINT TEAM BEFORE.

2. SUMMARY. THE SOURCE, SRCOL NGUYEN NGOC SON (NGUYEENX NGOCJ SOWN), PROVIDED INFORMATION CONCERNING THE 968TH DIV'S MISSION AND OPERATING AREA IN SOUTHERN LAOS BETWEEN LATE 1970 AND 1975.

ENCLOSURE(3)

THE SOURCE CLAIMED KNOWLEDGE OF NO U.S. ACTIVITY IN HIS UNIT'S AREA OF SOUTHERN LAOS DURING THAT PERIOD, AND THAT THE 968TH DIV NEVER CLASHED WITH U.S. OR REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (RVN) GROUND FORCES OR TOOK U.S. PRISONERS. NEITHER DID THE 968TH DIV EVER SHOOT DOWN A U.S. AIRCRAFT. THE UNIT'S MISSION WAS TO ASSIST LAO COMMUNIST TROOPS IN LIBERATING SOUTHERN LAOS AND PROTECT THE WESTERN FLANK OF THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL. THE SOURCE HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF PRISON CAMPS IN VIETNAM OR LAOS. SRCOL SON CLAIMED HE HAD NEVER, SINCE 1973, SEEN OR HAD KNOWLEDGE OF U.S. PERSONNEL, LIVING FREELY OR AGAINST THEIR WILL, IN VIETNAM.

3. DETAILS.

A. FOLLOWING INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS FROM THE JOINT TEAM AND BAC THAI PROVINCE OFFICIALS, THE INTERVIEWER OUTLINED THE TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION. SRCOL SON PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

B. SRCOL NGUYEN NGOC SON SERVED AS POLITICAL OFFICER FOR THE PAVN 968TH DIV, A VOLUNTEER UNIT, IN SOUTHERN LAOS BETWEEN DECEMBER 1970 AND 1975. THE DIVISION OPERATED ON THE WESTERN FLANK OF THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL IN THE FIVE SOUTHERNMOST LAO PROVINCES: ATTAPU, SALAVAN, BOULAVAN HIGHLANDS, CHAMPASAK, AND "TAVATLONG" (PHONETIC SPELLING). LAO COMMUNIST MILITARY REGIONS 3 AND 4 ENCOMPASSED THIS REGION. THE UNIT'S PRIMARY MISSION WAS TO ASSIST LAO COMMUNIST TROOPS IN LIBERATING SOUTHERN LAOS, WITH A SECONDARY MISSION OF PROVIDING SECURITY FOR THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL'S WESTERN FLANK. THE 968TH DIV WAS THE ONLY PAVN INFANTRY DIVISION STATIONED IN THAT AREA, WITH LAO TROOPS COMPROMISING THE MAJORITY OF COMMUNIST FORCES THERE.

C. IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE 968TH DIV'S ENTRY INTO LAOS IN DECEMBER 1970, SRCOL SON'S TROOPS ASSISTED IN LIBERATING ATTAPU PROVINCE. FROM 1971 ON, THE UNIT ASSISTED LAO COMMUNIST FORCES IN WIDENING THE LIBERATED ZONE THROUGHOUT THE FIVE SOUTHERNMOST LAO PROVINCES. PAVN DIVISION PERSONNEL WORKED DIRECTLY WITH LAO COMMUNIST TROOPS IN THIS ENDEAVOR AND, THE SOURCE CLAIMED, ALWAYS TRANSFERRED OPERATIONAL CONTROL TO THE LAO AFTER OCCUPYING AN AREA.

D. DURING THIS PERIOD, THE DIVISION NEVER ENCOUNTERED OR CLASHED WITH U.S. OR RVN FORCES, EITHER IN THE PROVINCES OR NEAR THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL. SRCOL SON CLAIMED HIS UNIT'S MAIN ADVERSARIES WERE LAO GOVERNMENT TROOPS AND THAI FORCES. THOUGH DIVISION PERSONNEL OCCASIONALLY SAW U.S. AIRCRAFT IN THE AIRSPACE ABOVE THEIR POSITIONS, THE 968TH WAS NOT AN AIR DEFENSE UNIT, WITH 14.5 AND 12.7 MILLIMETER ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS THEIR LARGEST CALIBER AIR DEFENSE WEAPONS. POLICY WAS NOT TO OPEN FIRE ON OR RETURN FIRE AGAINST ENEMY AIRCRAFT DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS TO AVOID DRAWING ATTENTION TO THEIR POSITIONS. ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNNERS OCCASIONALLY FIRED ON ENEMY AIRCRAFT AT NIGHT, BUT THIS WAS SELDOM THE CASE. IN 1971 AND 1972, VERY FEW AIRCRAFT OPERATED IN SOUTHERN LAO AIRSPACE, BUT THE MAJORITY OF THE PLANES THAT DID

OPERATE THERE WERE PROPELLER DRIVEN. BETWEEN 1973 AND 1975, U.S. B-52 STRIKES AND FIGHTER-BOMBERS STRIKES WERE MORE COMMON, WITH A STRIKE AGAINST COMMUNIST FORCES IN SOUTHERN LAOS OCCURRING TWO OR THREE TIMES A MONTH. SRCOL SON CLAIMED HIS TROOPS NEVER SHOT DOWN A U.S. OR ANY OTHER AIRCRAFT. HE VAGUELY REMEMBERED INCIDENTS OF AIRCRAFT DOWNED, PROBABLY BY GROUP 559 ELEMENTS, OVER THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL, BUT COULD PROVIDE NO DETAILS. SINCE THE 968TH DIV, A MOBILE UNIT, OPERATED IN REMOTE AREAS OF LAOS, IT SELDOM RECEIVED OTHER THAN TACTICAL INFORMATION FROM ITS UPPER ECHELON, AND NEVER RECEIVED REPORTS OF DOWNED U.S. PILOTS IN ITS OPERATING AREA.

E. THE 968TH DIV'S POLICY CONCERNING PRISONERS OF WAR, ACCORDING TO SRCOL SON, WAS MAINLY HUMANITARIAN. PAVN PERSONNEL WERE TO TREAT PRISONERS HUMANELY AND ENSURE THEIR NEEDS WERE TENDED TO AS THE SITUATION ALLOWED. AFTER CAPTURING A PRISONER, THE 968TH DIV STAFF ELEMENT REPORTED TO HIGHER HEADQUARTERS BY RADIO THE NUMBER OF PRISONERS CAPTURED. PAVN PERSONNEL THEN TURNED LAO AND THAI PRISONERS OVER TO LAO COMMUNIST FORCES. THE 968TH NEVER CAPTURED A U.S. PRISONER, BUT STANDING POLICY WAS TO TREAT THE PRISONER HUMANELY, REPORT THE INCIDENT TO HIGHER HEADQUARTERS, AND AWAIT FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS. SRCOL SON BELIEVED THAT, HAD HIS DIVISION EVER CAPTURED AN AMERICAN, THE UNIT WOULD HAVE RECEIVED ORDERS TO TURN THE PRISONER OVER TO THE VIETNAM PRISON SYSTEM FOR INCARCERATION.

F. CONCERNING PRISON CAMPS IN LAOS OR VIETNAM, SRCOL SON COULD PROVIDE NO INFORMATION. SINCE THE 968TH DIV'S RESPONSIBILITIES ENDED WHEN THEY TURNED (LAO AND THAI) PRISONERS OVER TO THE COMMUNIST LAO, SRCOL SON CLAIMED NO KNOWLEDGE OF PRISON CAMP SYSTEMS IN LAOS OR IN VIETNAM. HE SAID THE DIVISION HELD NO DOCUMENTS CONCERNING PRISONERS OF WAR. CERTAIN ENTRIES IN THE UNIT'S OPERATION'S LOG WOULD HAVE RECORDED NUMBERS OF PRISONERS CAPTURED, BUT SINCE THE 968TH DIV DISSOLVED IN 1976, SRCOL SON HAD NO IDEA WHERE THIS DOCUMENT MIGHT BE NOW.

G. IN RESPONSE TO DIRECT QUESTIONING, SRCOL SON CLAIMED NO KNOWLEDGE OF U.S. PERSONNEL, LIVING FREELY OR AGAINST THEIR WILL, IN VIETNAM SINCE 1973.

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SUBJ/INTERVIEW OF REQUESTED SOURCE, NGUYEN NGOC SON//

RMKS/

4. CORRELATIONS TO EXISTING POW/MIA CASES. NONE.

5. POTENTIAL LEADS. NONE.

6. MATERIAL EVIDENCE: NONE. THIS SOURCE BROUGHT NO RECORDS ,

NOTEBOOKS, DIARIES, OR ANY MATERIAL EVIDENCE ASSOCIATED WITH UNACCOUNTED FOR PERSONNEL.

7. COMMENTS.

A. THE SOURCE, SRCOL NGUYEN NGOC SON, WAS RELAXED AND STRAIGHTFORWARD DURING THE INTERVIEW. HE SHOWED NO EVIDENCE OF COACHING OR SCRIPTING, NOR DID HE LOOK TO THE VNOSMP FOR GUIDANCE AT ANY TIME DURING THE SESSION. THE INTERVIEW TEAM FOUND NO CONTRADICTIONS IN HIS STATEMENTS. ASSESS THIS SOURCE'S RELIABILITY TO BE GOOD.

B. THE MEMBERS OF THE JOINT TEAM CONFERRED ON THE QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED DURING THIS INTERVIEW. TEAM MEMBERS AGREED THAT THE NEED TO RE-INTERVIEW THIS SUBJECT WOULD DEPEND ON WHETHER FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR SRCOL SON ARISE DURING THE COURSE OF THE SPECIAL INTERVIEW TEAM'S FUTURE WORK.

C. REQUEST THE VNOSMP MAKE SRCOL NGUYEN NGOC SON AVAILABLE FOR RE-INTERVIEW IF NECESSARY.//

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