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ADMINISTRATIVE MESSAGE

ROUTINE

R 210702Z OCT 93 ZYB PSN 826195P31

FM CDR JTF-FA HONOLULU HI//J2//

TO SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//USDP:RSA//

INFO WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASH DC
JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC//J5// USCINCPAC LO WASHINGTON DC
DIA WASHINGTON DC CJTFFA DET ONE BANGKOK TH
USDAO BANGKOK TH//PW-MIA//
SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC//CA/OCS/CCS/EAP/VLC//
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI//J2/J3/J30-M//

UNCLAS //N03460//
SECTION 01 OF 02

MSGID/GENADMIN/CDR JTF-FA/J2//
SUBJ/INTERVIEW OF REQUESTED SOURCE, MG TRAN BACH DANG//

REF/A/FAX/DET 2/30SEP93//

AMPN/SUBJ/ENTRY NUMBER 41, LIST OF 83 INTERVIEW REQUESTS//
THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE IS A VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTION OF AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT FIELD REPORT//

RMKS/1. BACKGROUND. ON 15 SEPTEMBER 1993, A JOINT U.S/VIETNAM ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM INTERVIEW TEAM INTERVIEWED RETIRED MAJOR GENERAL (MG) TRAN BACH DANG, - A 73 YOA RESIDENT OF 14 PHAN KE BINH STREET, DISTRICT 1, HO CHI MINH CITY (HQMC). MG TRAN BACH DANG IS A FORMER COMMANDER OF THE SAIGON - GIA DINH SPECIAL ZONE AND PARTY SECRETARY OF THE B2 FRONT. HE IS CURRENTLY THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE HCMC SOCIAL SCIENCES COUNCIL. THE TEAM MET AT THE EXTERNAL RELATIONS OFFICE, 6 THAI VAN LUNG STREET, DISTRICT 1 HCMC, TO INTERVIEW MG TRAN BACH CANG, LISTED IN REFERENCE AS A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF INFORMATION CONCERNING U.S. PERSONNEL MISSING IN ACTION (MIA) IN VIETNAM. THE U.S. CONTINGENT CONSISTED OF MR. [redacted], DET 2 CASUALTY RESOLUTION SPECIALIST, AND SGT [redacted], JTF-FA

J2(1)...INFO FOR USCINCPAC HONOLULU H(13) 00499/17/1291
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RECALLED/ RTD:000-000/COPIES:0013

ENCLOSURE(7)

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ANALYST/LINGUIST. THE VIETNAMESE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT CONTINGENT CONSISTED OF LTC LE KY, MINISTRY OF DEFENSE; AND MR. NGUYEN VAN THANG LOI, MINISTRY OF INTERIOR. OTHER PERSONNEL ATTENDING THIS INTERVIEW WERE MR. LE KIM LAM, HCMC MIA TEAM CHIEF; MR. HA, HCMC PUBLIC SECURITY SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE; AND PAVN LTC TRAN VAN TAN, MILITARY REGION SEVEN (MR7) HEADQUARTERS REPRESENTATIVE.

2. SUMMARY. THE SOURCE, MG TRAN BACH DANG, FORMERLY THE PARTY SECRETARY OF - THE SAIGON - GIA DINH SPECIAL ZONE, AND CONCURRENTLY THE COMMANDER OF THE SPECIAL ZONE, DESCRIBED HIS WARTIME ROLE AND THE SPECIAL ZONE'S POLICY CONCERNING PRISONERS OF WAR. MG DANG TALKED AT LENGTH ABOUT U.S. POLICY TOWARD VIETNAM AND HIS OPINIONS REGARDING POW/MIA SEARCH EFFORTS. HE CLAIMED NO KNOWLEDGE OF U.S. PERSONNEL LIVING FREELY OR AGAINST THEIR WILL IN VIETNAM SINCE 1973.

3. DETAILS. AFTER INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS BY THE JOINT TEAM, THE SOURCE PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

A. THE SOURCE, MG TRAN BACH DANG (TRAANF BACHJ DAWNGF) SAID THAT DURING THE WAR HE WAS COMMANDER OF A MILITARY REGION. HE SAID THAT FOR THIS REASON WHEN A U.S. SERVICEMAN WAS CAPTURED, HE WAS ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PW. MG DANG SAID THAT TODAY THE MILITARY REGION THAT HE CONTROLLED DURING THE WAS IS SOMETIMES INCORRECTLY REFERRED TO AS MILITARY REGION SEVEN (MR7). HE SAID THAT DURING THE WAR THERE WERE ACTUALLY FOUR MILITARY REGION: MR1, MR2, MR3, MR4. THE FOUR MILITARY REGIONS OR ZONES WERE LATER KNOWN AS MR7, MR8, MR9, AND SAIGON SPECIAL ZONE, RESPECTIVELY. MG DANG SAID THAT THE SAIGON SPECIAL ZONE WAS HIS LEADERSHIP'S ANSWER FOR DEALING WITH SPECIAL SITUATIONS IN AREAS SUCH AS SAIGON, CU CHI, UNDEVELOPED RURAL AREAS, AND DELTA REGIONS WHICH REQUIRED SPECIAL ADMINISTERING.

B. MG DANG SAID THAT HE WAS THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE LIBERATION ARMY (SVNLA) B2 FRONT PARTY SECRETARY FOR THE SAIGON - GIA DINH SPECIAL ZONE DURING THE WAR, AND AS SUCH, WAS SEPARATE FROM THE MILITARY GENERAL STAFF. HE SAID THAT THE GENERAL STAFF FOR THE REGION HAD ITS OWN STAFF TO DEAL WITH MILITARY MATTERS. HE SAID THAT THE GENERAL STAFF WOULD BRING SOME CONCERNS TO HIS ATTENTION BUT, AS A RULE, THE GENERAL STAFF TOOK CARE OF THEIR OWN AFFAIRS. AS THE PARTY SECRETARY, MG DANG SAID HE DID NOT PERSONALLY PARTICIPATE IN COMBAT DURING THE WAR, BUT FOUGHT BATTLES OF A POLITICAL NATURE. MG DANG SAID THAT HE CURRENTLY SERVES AS MUNICIPAL PARTY SECRETARY FOR HCMC.

C. MG DANG SAID THAT THE SPECIAL ZONE, ALONE, COULD NOT PROVIDE FOR PW'S BECAUSE IT HAD NO REAR AREA. ACCORDINGLY, THE ZONE RELIED UPON THE CU CHI AREA TO PROVIDE ALL PROVISIONS. IN ORDER TO EFFECT THIS, THE SPECIAL ZONE HAD ITS OWN HEADQUARTERS AND COMMAND POST. HE SAID THAT BY 1975, NEARLY EVERY PART OF THE CU CHI AREA HAD BEEN HIT BY AIR STRIKES, CONTRIBUTING GREATLY TO THE SUPPLY AND LOGISTICS PROBLEMS FACED BY THE SPECIAL ZONE.

D. MG DANG SAID SPECIAL ZONE UNITS DID NOT CAPTURE A LARGE NUMBER OF PW'S OVER THE YEARS, BUT AS HE RECALLED, BOTH KOREANS AND AMERICANS WERE CAPTURED. ACCORDING TO POLICY, MG DANG SAID, THE PW'S

WERE TAKEN TO HOLDING CAMPS OUTSIDE THE ZONE. HE CONTINUED TO SAY THAT HE AND HIS STAFF DID NOT PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO THE FATES OF THE PW'S ONCE THEY WERE OUTSIDE THE ZONE. HIS CONCERNS WERE IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY FOR TREATMENT OF PW'S WHILE BEING EVACUATED FROM THE ZONE, SUCH AS ENSURING THAT THEY RECEIVED ADEQUATE FOOD AND SHELTER. MG DANG SAID THAT OCCASIONALLY THE SVNLF EXCHANGED PRISONERS WITH THE U.S AND THE LAST OF THE U.S. PW'S WERE REPATRIATED AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE PARIS PEACE ACCORDS IN 1973.

E. MG DANG POINTED OUT THE IMPACT OF THE U.S RAID ON THE SON TAY PRISON. HE SAID THAT THE SON TAY RAID SERVED AS A SYMBOL TO THE VIETNAMESE LEADERSHIP ABOUT THEIR PW SYSTEM. THE RAID DEMONSTRATED THE CAPABILITY OF THE U.S. TO GO INTO VIETNAMESE TERRITORY, BUT ALSO ALLOWED THE VIETNAMESE TO REDEFINE THEIR METHODS OF ENSURING THAT PW'S WERE HELD IN LOCATIONS THAT COULD NOT POSSIBLY BE LOCATED BY ANY MEANS.

F. AFTER 1973, MG DANG SAID THAT THERE WAS NO REASON TO KEEP AMERICAN PW'S. HE SAID THAT HE WAS AWARE OF THE U.S MIA ISSUE, BUT THERE WERE MANY, MANY REASONS FOR THE INDIVIDUALS TO STILL BE MISSING. HE WEIGHED THIS WITH THE FACT THAT THE VIETNAMESE STILL HAVE MORE THAN 300,000 MIA'S FROM THEIR OWN COUNTRY WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN FOUND. MG DANG SAID THAT BASED ON HIS OWN EXPERIENCE, LOSSES RESULTING FROM COMPANY-SIZE OR SMALLER COMBAT ACTIONS WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO ACCOUNT FOR. IN AN ASIDE, MG DANG MENTIONED THAT HE HAD RECENTLY MET WITH FORMER U.S. SENATOR EDMUND MUSKIE AND THAT THE TWO OF THEM HAD DISCUSSED THIS SAME SUBJECT. HE BRIEFLY DISMISSED OTHER SITUATIONS THAT RESULTED IN MIA'S, WHICH HE FEELS WILL BE DIFFICULT TO RESOLVE, SUCH AS U.S. AIRCRAFT LOSSES OVER LAOS OR CAMBODIA.

G. IN LIGHT OF THE U.S. POSITION AS A WORLD SUPER POWER, MG DANG SAID IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FOOLISH FOR VIETNAM TO DETAIN PRISONERS AFTER THE END OF THE WAR, KNOWING THE DAY WOULD ARRIVE WHEN VIETNAM AND THE U.S. MUST COME TO TERMS WITH EACH OTHER. HE SAID THE LEADERS OF HIS COUNTRY WERE INTELLIGENT ENOUGH TO LOOK TO THE FUTURE AND KNOW THEY WOULD BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS TOWARD U.S. PW'S. MG DANG SAID THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT HAD A POLICY PROHIBITING THE MISTREATMENT OF PW'S AND WOULD CERTAINLY NOT HAVE DETAINED PRISONERS AFTER 1973. AFTER THE RETURN OF PEACE TO THE COUNTRY IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE TO CONTINUE HIDING PW'S FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD, HE SAID, AND THERE WAS NOTHING TO JUSTIFY THE COST. HE SAID THAT SOME
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