

JOINT INVESTIGATION REPORT OF A CASE IN BAC YEN

On 2 and 3 December 1991, a joint Vietnamese-American investigation team consisting of Pham Van Ruyen, Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Representative and Team Chief; Staff Sergeant James L. Ross, Team Chief; Ngo Huy Chuong, Vietnamese Ministry of the Interior Representative; Sergeant First Class Stephen E. Thompson, Team Analyst; Do Xuan Thang, Vietnamese Ministry of Defense Representative; Sergeant First Class John J. Robinson and Staff Sergeant James D. Lee, Search and Recovery Specialists; and, Sergeant First Class Chris O. Hybolt, Team Medic; conducted an investigation of cases in Bac Yen District, Son La Province. The team was assisted in it's work by the Son La Province Task Team consisting of retired Sr. Col. Nguyen Van Tho, Team Leader, and Mr.'s Do Hieu and Tran Tien.

On the morning of 2 December 1991, the Joint Team travelled to Phieng Ban Village, Bac Yen District, where Mr. Thao A Giang, Chairman of the Bac Yen District People's Committee, greeted the team. Mr. Giang welcomed the team and promised to create all favorable conditions for the team's work while in Bac Yen District. Mr. Giang introduced the District Task Team consisting of Mr. Phan Duc Thanh, Team Leader, and Mr.'s Ha Son and Dinh Lam who would assist the joint team in it's work in the district. Mr. Giang then presented a brief summary of three incidents occurring within the district boundaries. One of these incidents involved an American AD-6 aircraft which crashed in an area called "Hang Dong." Mr. Giang stated that the local militia shot down the aircraft and that the pilot apparently died in the crash. The joint team questioned Mr. Giang briefly for further details concerning the three incidents, but he admitted having no personal knowledge concerning any of them and recommended the team interview the witnesses for further details.

On the afternoon of 2 December, the joint team interviewed Ms. Lo Thi Lit, an ethnic Thai born in 1949. The team was assisted by Mr. Ha Thanh Binh who acted as a Vietnamese-Ethnic Thai language interpreter. Ms. Lit stated that she was a militia member on 12 September 1966, when she witnessed two American aircraft flying from the south to the north over Phieng Ban Village. Ms. Lit recalled that the first aircraft was flying high in the sky and that the second was bigger and flying low behind the first. According to Ms. Lit, the village militia opened fire with K44 rifles and machine guns causing the aircraft to burst into flames. Ms. Lit watched the aircraft burning in the sky and said that she did not see any parachutes in the sky during or after the incident. Ms. Lit said that the aircraft did not explode while in the air. The aircraft crashed into the ethnic H'Mong mountains at a place that is now called Hang Dong Hamlet, Ta Sua Village. Ms. Lit said that she did not visit the crash site and explained that she was on duty at the time and obligated to remain at her post. Ms. Lit also said that she never heard any further news concerning the aircraft except that other villagers said the aircraft was an American ED-6. She said that she still recalls the exact date of the incident because other villagers remind her of the date and because it was one of her accomplishments during the war; however, Ms Lit also stated she was unsure if the date provided is a solar or lunar calendar date. Ms. Lit recalled that it was a bright, sunny day on the incident date and that there were few clouds in the sky. Ms. Lit also recalled that the incident took place sometime between 8 and 10 AM. Ms. Lit said that her unit consisted of

four people: Mr. Mui Van Do, at that time the militia air-defense commander, Mr. Luong Van Nui, and Mr. Hoang Van Choi. Ms. Lit stated that Mr. Do and Mr. Nui still reside in Phieng Ban Village, but Mr. Choi is now deceased. Ms. Lit said that she knew of no other incidents that occurred in the area other than a 1972 incident in which Soviet specialists recovered the remains of the pilot. Mr. Thang of the joint team explained to the American team members that this incident involved the crash of a Soviet aircraft in which Soviet specialists recovered the remains in 1982. The joint team thanked Ms. Lit for her cooperation during the interview and then examined and photographed a certificate awarded to her by the military region headquarters for shooting down an American aircraft. Unfortunately, this certificate did not provide an exact date of the incident nor did it provide any other corroborating information.

Following the interview with Ms. Lit, the joint team interviewed Mr. Phang A Chu, a 46 year of age ethnic H'mong. Because of Mr. Chu's limitations in the Vietnamese language, Mr. Thao Ha provided Vietnamese-H'mong language interpreter assistance for the joint team. Mr. Chu stated that during the war he was a militia squad leader for Ta Xu Hamlet, Ta Xua A Village and that he visited the crash site of an American aircraft where he saw the body of an American pilot. He said that he did not witness the aircraft crash, and he could provide no information concerning the cause of the crash. Mr. Chu further stated that he could not identify the type of aircraft that crashed at the site. He said that he went to the crash site at the Hang Dong Stream where he saw an American pilot's body laying two to three double-arm spans above the crash site. Mr. Chu was accompanied to the site by eight people including Mr. Phang Lanh, the commander of the village militia who is now deceased, and Mr.'s Phang Nu, Phang Chu and Mua Tro who all now reside in Xuan Nha Village, Moc Chau District. Mr. Chu stated that he did not see a parachute or ejection seat at the site and that the pilot was only wearing a white undershirt and underpants at the time. He arrived at the site eight days following the aircraft crash and found the body of the pilot to be too decayed to provide a physical description. Mr. Chu explained that others in the area said the aircraft had crashed eight days earlier. He could only recall that the pilot's skull was severely fractured. Mr. Chu did not see the pilot's uniform, his boots, his helmet or any other personal equipment at the site. He stated that the members of the militia buried the pilot more than one meter deep at the crash site using four planks of wood for a coffin. Dirt was piled up on top of the grave and no other marker was placed at the site. Three years later he returned to the site with Mr. Phang Nu, Mr. Lu A Xua of Ta Xua C Village, and Mr. Kha of the District Military Command who now resides at Vi Hamlet, Gia Phu Village. The four recovered what Mr. Chu considered to be a complete remains and reburied them near a military graveyard in Phieng Ban Hamlet. He recalled that the remains recovered included the skull, ribs, arm and leg bones, and the mandible and maxillary which both contained teeth. He stated that the remains were placed in a plastic bag and reburied approximately one-half meter deep. The dirt was then piled on top of the grave and no marker was used to indicated the burial location. He said that he could point out the reburial location within a ten square meter area, but he did not know if the remains of the American had ever been recovered after their reburial. The joint team then concluded their questioning and thanked Mr. Chu for his cooperation during the interview.

The third witness interviewed by the joint team on 2 December 1991, was

Mr. Dinh Van Ton who was born on 6 June 1930 and was a former platoon leader of the Hang Dong Forestry and Agricultural Products Committee Self Defense forces. Mr. Ton stated that he witnessed the shoot down of an American AD-6 aircraft on an unrecalled date and went to the crash site on the following day with Mr. Cuong, the Deputy District Military commander at the time. At the site, he saw the remains of the pilot which he described as being of a male caucasian, approximately 1.7 to 1.8 meters in height, weighing approximately 80 kilograms with brown hair. He recalled that the pilot was wearing only white socks, a sleeveless white undershirt and a slip. Mr. Ton explained that local Meo villagers had already been to the site and recovered the pilot's uniform and personal belongings. He said that at the site he also saw and recovered the pilot's helmet and boots and a pair of gold-framed reading glasses with small lens. He gave the glasses to his children which were subsequently destroyed and transferred the boots to village officials. Mr. Ton kept the helmet as a souvenir which he later allowed the joint team to examine and photograph. He also stated that he recalled seeing CBU's and a CBU canister at the crash site. He stated that he and Mr. Cuong did not bring shovels to the site and, therefore, they could not buried the pilot. They went back to the village that evening and returned to the site on the following day when Mr. Ton assisted in burying the pilot with Mr. Chu and others. Mr. Ton also provided further information which is related to two other cases in Bac Yen District.

On the morning of 3 December 1991, the joint team visited the Bac Yen District Cultural House in Phieng Ban Village where they were greeted by Mr. Do Duc Tho, the Cultural House Director. Mr. Ruyen explained the mission of the joint team and requested assistance in examining any items in the Cultural House that might pertain to Americans or American aircraft shot down during the Vietnam War. Mr. Tho explained that the Cultural House has nothing on display or in storage pertaining to the team's mission. Mr. Tho went on to say that the Cultural House has only a few items in their storage room, none of which pertain to Americans or American aircraft. The only exception, Mr. Tho said, was the helmet which the joint team examined on the previous day. The joint team asked who had supplied the helmet to the Cultural House and Mr. Tho informed the team that Mr. Dinh Xuan Co, the former Deputy District Military Commander of Phieng Ban Village, had turned the helmet over to the Cultural House. Mr. Tho said that Co is now deceased but at one time possessed the helmet and a life vest which may now be at the District Military Headquarters. The joint team requested to view the items in the Cultural House storage room and Mr. Tho was extremely cooperative in providing free access to all items and records. In the storage room the team found several photographs of aircraft wreckage which the team examined and photographed. No records could be found to indicate the origin of the photographs which all appeared to be historical in nature and not related to incidents in Bac Yen District. The joint team thanked Mr. Tho for his assistance and returned to the District headquarters to interview a witness concerning another case in Bac Yen District.

On the afternoon of 3 December 1991, the joint team met again with Mr. Thao A Giang, Chairman of the Bac Yen District People's Committee and reported the results of the team's investigation. The team thanked Mr. Giang and the people of Bac Yen District for their cooperation and hospitality and wished them health and happiness in their upcoming New Year celebration. Following the meeting with Mr. Giang, the joint team returned by team vehicles to Phu

Yen Town for further investigations.

This report completed on 12 December 1991 in Hanoi.

VIETNAMESE TEAM CHIEF

AMERICAN TEAM CHIEF

PHAM VAN RUYEN

JAMES L. ROSS

F-105
INCIDENT
(1 PILOT)

JOINT INVESTIGATION REPORT OF A CASE IN BAC YEN PROVINCE

On 2 and 3 December 1991, a joint Vietnamese-American investigation team consisting of Pham Van Ruyen, Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Representative and Team Chief; Staff Sergeant James L. Ross, Team Chief; Ngo Huy Chuong, Vietnamese Ministry of the Interior Representative; Sergeant First Class Stephen E. Thompson, Team Analyst; Do Xuan Thang, Vietnamese Ministry of Defense Representative; Sergeant First Class John J. Robinson and Staff Sergeant James D. Lee, Search and Recovery Specialists; and, Sergeant First Class Chris O. Hybolt, Team Medic; conducted an investigation of cases in Bac Yen District, Son La Province. The team was assisted in it's work by the Son La Province Task Team consisting of retired Sr. Col. Nguyen Van Tho, Team Leader, and Mr.'s Do Hieu and Tran Tien.

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During interviews by the joint team on 2 December 1991, Mr. Dinh Van Ton who was born on 6 June 1930 and was a former platoon leader of the Hang Dong Forestry and Agricultural Products Committee Self Defense forces, stated that he heard of the death of an American pilot near Phieng Ban Village on an unrecalled date following an AD-6 shoot down. Mr. Ton saw an F-105 aircraft flying from the northeast to the southwest when it was shot down by an unknown unit. The pilot ejected from the aircraft, but his parachute did not properly deploy killing him immediately upon impact with the ground. Mr. Ton stated that the pilot's body landed on the far side of a hill between Phieng Ban and Hong Ngay Villages. Mr. Ton stated that he did not personally view the remains of the pilot but heard that the pilot's watch, clothes and parachute were taken prior to his burial and turned over to the District Military. Mr. Ton said that Dinh Van Soc who resides in Phieng Ban Village buried the remains of this pilot. Mr. Ton said that the F-105 aircraft continued until it crashed on the other side of the Black River. Mr. Ton added that he heard the aircraft wreckage was later recovered by the Chinese unit constructing Friendship Route 11. Mr. Ton did not know if anyone recovered the remains of the pilot following his burial by Mr. Soc and said that he did not follow the incident closely. Mr. Ton said that he heard that there was only one pilot in this F-105 aircraft. The joint team then thanked Mr. Ton for his cooperation and terminated interviews for the day.

At the District headquarters the joint team met Mr. Dinh Van Sac, a 52

year old resident of Phieng Ban Village. Mr, Sac stated that he was a militia squad leader in April 1971 when he saw the body of the pilot near the hill in Phieng Ban Village. Mr. Sac explained that it was April 1971 by the lunar calendar and that he recalled the time frame because his family had been evacuated from their home village to Phieng Ban. Mr. Sac stated that at approximately 4 o'clock in the afternoon he saw a jet aircraft of unknown type pass over Phieng Ban Village and observed the ejection of the pilot from the aircraft. Mr. Sac said that the pilot's parachute failed to open and he saw the parachute twisting as it fell from the sky. Mr. Sac went to the area where the pilot had landed arriving approximately 50 minutes after the incident. Mr. Sac stated that there were two unidentified Meo villagers at the site prior to his arrival and that later that day Province, District and Village officials arrived and took the pilot's body away. At the site Mr. Sac recalled seeing the parachute with risers which were twisted like a rope and the pilot's body. Mr. Sac described the pilot as being a short, fat caucasian who had suffered severe damage from the fall. Mr. Sac stated that the back of the pilot's head was crushed and that his neck had been forced down into the body. Mr. Sac did not see the ejection seat at the site or the pilot's helmet. He said that he later heard the pilot's helmet was found after a nearby field was burned in preparation for cultivation. Mr. sac stated that another Phieng Ban Village militia squad buried the pilot and that he did not participate. Mr. Sac could not provide any names of those who carried out the burial of the pilot. When the joint team further questioned Mr. Sac concerning the date of the incident, Mr. Sac said that the date was approximately two seasons (years) prior to the death of Ho Chi Minh. At this point the joint team concluded their interview with Mr. Sac and thanked him for his assistance.

On the afternoon of 3 December 1991, the joint team met again with Mr. Thao A Giang, Chairman of the Bac Yen District People's Committee and reported the results of the team's investigation. The team thanked Mr. Giang and the people of Bac Yen District for their cooperation and hospitality and wished them health and happiness in their upcoming New Year celebration. Following the meeting with Mr. Giang, the joint team returned by team vehicles to Phu Yen Town for further investigations.

This report completed on 12 December 1991 in Hanoi.

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(2 PILOTS)

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The third witness interviewed by the joint team on 2 December was Mr. Dinh Van Ton who was born on 6 June 1930 and was a former platoon leader of the Hang Dong Forestry and Agricultural Products Committee Self Defense forces. Mr. Ton stated that he witnessed an F-105 crash on an unknown date prior to another incident that occurred in Bac yen District. Mr. Ton said that the F-105 aircraft was shot over Yen Bai and crashed near the Long Stream in Lang Cheu Village. According to Mr. Ton, both pilots ejected from the aircraft. One of the pilots was rescued and the other was captured by local militia forces and later turned over to the Province Military Command. He also added that members of a Chinese unit stationed near Phieng Ban Village attempted to obtain custody of the pilot by claiming that they shot the aircraft down, but the militia would not release the pilot to them. Mr. Ton said that this Chinese unit was a road construction team working on Friendship Route 11 to Yen Bai. He described the captured pilot as being a fat caucasian with black hair who the Province Military Command said was an Australian. He said that he heard the pilot was later released and returned to his home.

Because all available information indicated that both pilots from this incident were returned to US control, the joint team conducted no further investigation of the case. Further analysis of this incident is necessary in order to correlate it to a specific case.

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