

J221/Habeeb
1771
Memo J2
31 Aug 93

MEMORANDUM

Subj: CASE SUMMARY - REFNO 0646

1. Circumstances of Loss:

a. On 21 April 1967, SP4 Thomas A. Mangino, PFC Paul A. Hasenback, ^{NAME} and PFC Daniel R. Nidds were returning from patrol in the second of two sampans on the Son Tra river, Binh Giang Village, Quang Ngai Province, in southern Vietnam. The platoon leader from the first sampan returned to base and reported that SP4 Mangino was in conversation with a local resident when he lost sight of him. The platoon leader also reported hearing 20-30 rounds of small arms fire 15 minutes after losing sight of the second sampan. The four soldiers from the second sampan never returned to base. An extensive area search revealed no trace of the four men.

b. Subsequent information from several wartime intelligence reports correlated with REFNO 0646 indicates that individuals associated with this case were possibly captured by an NVA or Viet Cong (VC) unit.

2. Investigations/Surveys/Excavations:

a. 12th Joint Field Activity: On 24 and 28 August 1992, a Joint Team traveled to Binh Dong Village, Binh Son District, Quang Ngai Province, and interviewed four witnesses associated with REFNO 0646. Two witnesses, Mr. Nguyen The Bong and Mrs. Nguyen Thi Phuong, are firsthand observers/participants of the incident. One witness, Mr. Phan Dinh Ba, was the Binh Dong Village Guerilla Chief at the time and provided credible hearsay information on the ambush and burial of the four soldiers as reported to him. The remaining witness, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Lieu, reported to have observed the bodies of four American soldiers but did not participate in their ambush or burial.

(1) Mr. Nguyen The Bong, a Binh Dong village guerilla at the time of the incident, provided a detailed account of his participation in the alleged ambush and killing of four American soldiers in the Binh Dong Village area at 1600 hours, on 15 or 16 April 1967. Mr. Bong said that when he learned that four American soldiers were lost and asking directions, he ordered two teenagers, Miss Nguyen Thi Hong and Mr. Vu Dinh Dung (both deceased) to approach the Americans and lead them to the ambush site. He and two other guerilla members, Mr. Nguyen Hoang and Mr. Nguyen Ngoc, took concealed positions just north of the Thuong Hoa Hamlet and adjacent to the Song Tra River. When the Americans were in range, the three guerilla numbers opened fire,

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killing all four soldiers. Mr. Bong described the four Americans as one Black and three Caucasians wearing olive green uniforms and helmets. At 1800 hours, an American force arrived in the area to search for missing soldiers. After several hours and negative results, they departed the area. A written report was delivered to the district force leader, Mr. Chien (deceased). Mr. Bong heard the bodies were buried three times in different locations, but never visited the final burial location.

(2) Mr. Phan Dinh Ba, village party chief during the time of this incident, said that he received a report concerning the death of four American soldiers in Thuong Hoa Hamlet. He heard the bodies were buried in the Dong Minh area. Mr. Ba visited the site, but did not recover any remains.

(3) Mrs. Nguyen Thi Phuong, resident of Binh Dong Village during the time of the incident provided the following account. For approximately three days in March 1967, an American force was conducting sweep operations in Binh Dong Village area. On the third day, from her home, she observed four American soldiers in a badly leaking sampan. She signalled for the Americans to come ashore and with three other women (all deceased), accompanied the four soldiers along the Hamlet road part of the way to the ambush site. At 1800 hours, Mrs. Phuong returned to her house and heard gunfire from the direction she had last seen the Americans. She and several villagers ran to the ambush site and observed four American soldiers lying dead. Mr. Nguyen Vang, then the village chief, ordered a hasty burial in the Son Tra River (weighted by rocks) to avoid detection by American forces. Mrs. Phuong participated in this burial. American forces arrived that evening, but were unsuccessful in locating the grave. About three days later, Mrs. Phuong noticed the bodies were surfacing. She notified Mr. Vang who arrived with about 12 people. Together, they transported the bodies down river and buried them near an earthen dam. Mrs. Phuong heard that Miss Nguyen Thi Hong (a teenager mentioned by first witness) participated in the ambush.

(4) Mrs. Nguyen Thi Lieu, a long-time resident of Binh Dong Village reportedly observed four dead American soldiers on an unrecalled day in April, 1967. They were covered in mud, and she could not provide an accurate description. Guerrillas buried the bodies in shallow water, and weighted them down with rocks. Mrs. Lieu heard that the bodies had become visible and were moved and reburied in a different location.

(5) The Investigation Element (IE) surveyed this last burial site with negative results. The site is currently under one meter of water, 25 meters from the river bank and approximately 600 meters from a partially destroyed dam.

b. In April 1993, Archival Research Team Two (ART 2) interviewed three witnesses, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Hong Thu, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Thanh Van and Mr. Nguyen Minh Thanh, associated with this case. All three reported to have participated in the burial of the four American soldiers and provided detailed hearsay information concerning the ambush and killing of the four Americans. Their testimony was consistent with witness testimony from the 19th JFA.

c. Conclusions. The information provided by witness testimony correlates well with the known facts maintained in JTF-FA files. The witnesses provided an accurate last known location, time frame, time of day and detailed circumstances of loss. All testimony given was deemed to be straight forward and unrehearsed. One discrepancy with the testimony was noted. Mr. Bong described one soldiers as black, however, all four men associated with REFNO 0646 are white. SP4 Mangino was dark skinned and it is not uncommon for Vietnamese to describe dark skinned men as black.

3. Archival Research: Numerous pieces of identification media and personal documents associated to SP4 Mangino, PFC Hasenbeck, ~~NAME~~ and PFC Nidds were discovered in the Military Region Five museum. Associated Vietnamese historical summary reports state that PFC Nidds and PFC Hasenbeck were killed in Quang Ngai Province by guerrilla forces.

4. Additional Information: Senior Colonel Dai, Director of the Central Armed Forces Museum, provided information consistent with this case in a special interview. He also provided access to his personal wartime diary which relates in detail the ambush, killing and burial of four American soldiers as it was reported to him. The diary correlates to REFNO 0646 by incident date, location, and known facts of the case. It also accurately identifies the four soldiers as wearing patches which read "Light Infantry Brigade 196."

5. Conclusions:

a. This case was investigated during the 19th Joint Field Activity (JFA), and was the subject of a special investigative effort conducted by ART 2. Additionally, one witness was interviewed in conjunction with the Oral History Program and provided a wartime diary with information correlating to REFNO 0646.

b. Analysis of witness testimony along with Senior Colonel Dai's diary indicates that the four American soldiers were led to an ambush site, killed and buried as reported. Team members interviewed a total of eight witnesses, of which one, Mr. Bong, provided strong firsthand information concerning his participation in the ambush and killing of the four American

golders. Mr. Bong's testimony was independently corroborated by Mrs. Phong, who reportedly walked with the four American soldiers part way to the ambush site, and observed their bodies shortly after they were killed by guerrilla members. Mrs. Lieu observed the four dead American soldiers and provided hearsay as to their burial. Of the remaining five witnesses, three said they participated in the burial of the four Americans, and two provided credible hearsay information as it was reported to them. All witnesses provided testimony which was very detailed and corroborated well with one another as well as with Colonel Dai's diary.

5. Recommendation: Fate determined for all four individuals associated with this case.