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Serex MIA File

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
ENVIRONMENT AND
PUBLIC WORKS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON
ETHICS
COMMISSION ON SECURITY
AND COOPERATION
IN EUROPE

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2903

October 1, 1993

The Honorable Les Aspin
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon, RM. 3E880
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Les:

I am writing to request your assistance in allowing the immediate family of Colonel Henry Muir Serex (USAF, MIA from North Vietnam since 4/2/72) to review intelligence information which I believe may potentially pertain to the fate of Colonel Serex.

During my tenure as Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, hearings were held and a Final Report was issued which, in part, concerned the reported presence of distress signals on overheard photography in northern Vietnam. (Hearings, 10/15/92 - Final Report, 1/13/93). These reported distress signals were identified by an independent consultant hired by the Select Committee and by a JSSA training specialist. Moreover, I personally viewed these signals on the photography during a visit to the Washington Navy Yard, Building 213, in November, 1992.

As background, the reported distress signals contained the name "SEREX," a symbol "72 TA 88," and another longer series of digits. In addition, these markings (and another marking which reportedly relates to Colonel Peter Matthes, USAF, MIA 11/24/69 from Laos), were located in a field adjacent to the Dong Vai prison in a remote area of northern Vietnam. I note that U.S. intelligence has received several human intelligence reports of American POWs at this location since 1973, although the prison has now been dismantled. There also was previous coverage of this prison by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1975 because of other markings which, at the time, were speculated to have possibly been related to the presence of Americans.

The position of the Department of Defense during the last Administration was that there was "no indication of any unusual man-made artifacts on the imagery." This was stated by former Assistant Secretary of Defense Duane Andrews at our Select Committee hearings in October, 1992 in response to Chairman Kerry's question pertaining to the potential "SEREX" markings. Nonetheless, the family of Colonel Serex is understandably concerned about this matter and has expressed to me a desire to review the same photography which I, the Committee's independent consultant, and the JSSA training specialist separately reviewed in 1992.

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I, therefore, request that you allow the wife and two daughters of Colonel Serex to review this photography at the earliest possible date. I further request that these arrangements be coordinated with my office so that I may be present, along with JSSA specialist Bob Dussault and the Committee's independent consultant from 1992, Colonel Larry Burroughs. Listed below are the names and addresses for the immediate family members:

Barbara Serex Lundeen - - wife of Col. Serex.

Kathryn Serex - - daughter

Jennifer Serex Helwig - - daughter

Mr. Secretary, prior to your tenure as Secretary, I had asked department officials to properly notify the families of Colonel Serex and Colonel Matthes that these potential distress signals were being reviewed by the Select Committee. I had sought to avoid disclosure of this information to the families through non-official channels. Unfortunately, the Defense Department did not so notify the families, and they subsequently learned this information through the news media.

My current request is certainly consistent with the spirit of prior Defense Department policies recently adopted pertaining to family access to any classified information, which, as the law states, "may pertain" to their missing loved ones.

I trust you can grant this reasonable request on an expedited basis given the understandable distress of the family at this moment. I look forward to your response.

With warmest regards,



BOB SMITH
United States Senator

BS/dc

cc: Senator Slade Gorton
Senator Patty Murray
Senator Dianne Feinstein
Senator Barbara Boxer