

BACKGROUND PAPER

SOURCE: Nguyen Thanh Cong.

- Mr. Cong and his friend Trinh Hung, observed two prisoners whom they believed to be Americans in a sampan that stopped briefly at a boat dock near the Xeo Ro market, Dong Yen Village, Kien An District, Rach Gia (Kien Giang) Province, at about 0800 hours, 2 May 1975.
 - Mr. Cong described one prisoner as Caucasian, relatively thin, and about 30 years old.
 - Mr. Cong described the other prisoner as "black, but not at all very dark;" and sturdily built.
- Mr. Cong observed the prisoners from a distance and was not able to see their full bodies. Their hands were bound, and Mr. Cong recalled that they were dressed in military uniforms. Mr. Cong was too far away to hear what was being said by the guards.
- Mr. Cong heard from members of the crowd of onlookers that the two prisoners were Americans.
- Mr. Cong conjectured that the two prisoners might have been U.S. Air Force helicopter pilots, "because about two days before these two persons were brought in I and nearly everyone in Xeo Ro heard that one helicopter that was flying out to the ships ran out of fuel and had to land at Canal 40, and another helicopter landed at Hon Tre (Rach Gia)."
- Except for the fact that he was not accompanied by a black man, the time, date, location, and circumstances presented by Mr. Cong offer nearly an exact correlation to the experience of Mr. Arlo Gay, who returned to the U.S. in September 1976. There are several reasons to believe that this report does not indicate a separate incident:
 - The description clearly indicates that the prisoners were recently captured, and were not prisoners held over from the pre-1973 war years.
 - All Americans who are known to have missed evacuation in April 1975, have been accounted for; and except for Mr. Gay, none of their experiences can be correlated to this reported sighting.
 - The DIA interviewed several U.S. officials who worked in Rach Gia and the surrounding provinces during 1973-1975. We could find evidence that only three Americans, Mssrs. Gay, Herman McDonald, and John LeCorney, missed the evacuation or were otherwise stranded in this region. Mr. McDonald remained in Long Xuyen, An Giang Province until he returned to the U.S. in 1976. Mr. LeCorney is believed to have returned to Vietnam in late May 1975, and to have died and been buried at Can Tho in about July-August 1975.

- In view of the distance from which Mr. Cong made this sighting, his admittedly limited view, and the power of suggestion from the crowd, it is possible that Mr. Cong mistook the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) officer who was detained and evacuated with Mr. Gay to be a black American. The fact that Mr. Hung, who accompanied Mr. Cong at the time of the sighting, asserted that both prisoners were Caucasian lends support to this theory.

- CONCLUSION

Because of the similarity of Mr. Cong's account and Mr. Gay's experience, and the fact that the preponderance of evidence available to the DIA indicates that Mr. Gay was the only American stranded in this locality during the time in question, we conclude that the prisoners whom Mr. Cong observed in the sampan near the Xeo Ro market, Kien An District, were Mr. Arlo Gay and one of the RVNAF officers with whom he was detained.