

4 September 1980

SUBJECT: Conversation with Mr. Arlo Gay

Reference: Telecon of 27 Aug 80 between Mr. Arlo Gay, US civilian and Mr. E. Valentine and Mr. R. Destatté, DIA/DI-7C.

1. In referencé, Mr. Gay was contacted for purpose of an indepth interview regarding his capture and captivity experiences while in the delta region of Vietnam. Mr. Gay had been contacted earlier for an overview of his confinement chronology and captivity experiences but, due to an increasing number of refugee reports regarding Americans in the delta region, more details were required regarding his experiences for comparison with the refugee reports.
2. Mr. Gay was a self-employed fisherman who owned a 60' modern shrimp trawler named "Lien Anh" that operated out of Nha Trang, a 50' Vietnamese fishing boat that operated out of Rach Gia, and a 100' barge that was anchored in the Rach Gia/Tien Te Island area. He maintained a permanent residence in Saigon. In early 1975, Mr. Gay entered into a verbal agreement with a representative of the US government to assist in the creation and operation of an emergency helicopter refueling site and make shift temporary accommodations for evacuees in the event it became necessary to organize an emergency evacuation route through the delta region. Mr. Gay's barge, anchored at Tien Te Island, located west of Rach Gia and approximately 12 miles north of Hon Tre Island, was selected as the helicopter refueling stop. However, the plan to use the barge/refueling stop was never implemented.
3. By 28 April 1975, approximately 100-120 Vietnamese men, women and children had been evacuated to Rach Gia, and assembled there under the care of Mr. Gay and his wife. Mr. Gay and his wife tried to arrange onward evacuation of these personnel whom he believed had been employees of intelligence agencies. Mr. Gay's modern boat, the Lien Anh, was still in Nha Trang and he was operating his old Vietnamese fishing boat out of Rach Gia. This old boat did not have a name, only a registration number which Mr. Gay no longer remembers. On 28 April 1975, Mr. Gay's wife obtained the cooperation of a local fishing boat captain to evacuate about 50 of the Vietnamese who were under the Gays' care. On 29 April, Mr. Gay was advised by a US officer (he could not remember the name exactly) to "get the hell out" of Rach Gia immediately. Mr. Gay took the remaining 50-60 Vietnamese personnel, including wives and children, aboard his fishing boat and left.
4. He encountered rough seas on the way to Hon Tre Island due to the interaction of wind and tides and decided to anchor temporarily at Hon Tre to await calmer seas. Mr. Gay then sailed to Tien Te Island. The US officer brought Mrs. Gay and their daughter by helicopter to Tien Te where they joined Mr. Gay. The US officer then departed for an unknown location. Mr. Gay had not been able to obtain fuel at either Hon Tre or Tien Te and was starting to run low. He decided that he would continue westward to a prearranged rendezvous point near Phu Quoc Island to meet the US officer or other American representative(s) who were to have arranged for alternate transportation for the Vietnamese

evacuees aboard. Approximately six miles from the rendezvous point early the next morning, he came upon a large ship (registry unknown) but was waived off by automatic weapons. Mr. Gay continued on to the rendezvous point but could not contact anyone on the two radio frequencies he had been given for contact with the US officials who were supposed to be at the rendezvous site. After waiting awhile he decided to return to Tien Te to obtain fuel and information about the current situation.

5. When he attempted to land at Tien Te his boat was fired upon by automatic weapons. He continued on to Hon Tre with the thought that he might be able to obtain fuel at a small Vietnamese Naval camp on Hon Tre. He anchored at Hon Tre after dark approximately 400 or 500 feet off shore. At approximately 2200-2230 hours, he was discussing who would go ashore (he didn't want to go as he was a caucasian and obviously would be noticed) when a UH-1 helicopter (no markings observed) flew over his boat. The helicopter dropped a flare and landed on the beach. Assuming that the beach was safe, (he later learned the helicopter had run out of fuel), Mr. Gay, his boat engineer and Mr. Gay's young brother-in-law went ashore to the helicopter. Shortly after he landed on the beach, he was arrested and held in isolation at the Navy camp's dispensary. The following morning, Mr. Gay, the six ARVN officers and their wives who had been aboard the helicopter, and Mr. Gay's brother-in-law were placed on a Navy patrol boat and taken to the mainland of Vietnam.

6. During Mr. Gay's capture incident, the boat engineer evaded capture and returned to the boat anchored offshore. A power struggle ensued between some of the passengers on one side and Mrs. Gay on the other. The passengers commandeered the boat at gun-point but, influenced by the engineer, went in circles for two days. Unknown to the passengers, the engineer before leaving Rach Gia had agreed only to help Mr. Gay get the boat passengers to Phu Quoc Island, but had categorically refused to leave his family and Vietnam. Finally, one passenger was landed at Hon Rai Island and two passengers at Cu Chon Island (Quan-Dao Nam Du), and the boat obtained some fuel at the latter island. The passengers then ordered the engineer to proceed to Hon Panjang Island and the international sea lanes. Using subterfuge, the engineer instead proceeded to his home island of Hon Nghe where he scuttled the boat's tool box and jumped overboard with the boat's compass, leaving the "landlubber" passengers helpless. Mrs. Gay was the only one aboard who knew how to operate the boat, and without a compass or adequate fuel she was forced to return to Rach Gia.

7. The morning, after capture, Mr. Gay and the Vietnamese persons who had been captured from the helicopter at Hon Tre were taken by Patrol boat to the mainland. They were taken to a well established VC base camp at canal 13 (unlocated) where they spent the day. They were separated from the wives of the ARVN officers and Mr. Gay's brother-in-law. The next morning Mr. Gay and the six ARVN officers began a 24 hour journey by sampan to a reeducation camp for ARVN enlisted personnel somewhere in the U-Minh Forest. Mr. Gay was dressed in a light shirt, brown slacks, and no shoes. He could not remember if the ARVN personnel were still in uniform at this point. Mr. Gay noted that one of the ARVN officers, LtCol Dinh Van Thoai (a GVN District Chief in Long Xuyen Province) looked different than the

other Vietnamese in the sampan as he had several days growth of unusually heavy gray whiskers and grey hair. In addition, during the journey by sampan LtCol Thoai conversed in excellent English with Mr. Gay and was seated next to Mr. Gay on the sampan. Mr. Gay agreed with the conjecture that LtCol Thoai could have been mistaken for an American by another Vietnamese if the sighting was brief and from a distance of 10 meters or more or if he was overheard speaking English while seated next to Mr. Gay. At one point in the journey, the sampan stopped briefly for food at a hamlet or village near what Mr. Gay thought was an old US naval base (unlocated) which had been abandoned possibly in 1967. A large number of predominantly hostile Vietnamese observed Mr. Gay at this stop. Mr. Gay noted that he was seen by thousands of Vietnamese during his initial movement and that their attitude ranged from curious to hostile. Mr. Gay's hands were loosely bound while he was in the sampan and intermittent attempts were made to cover the prisoners by placing a plastic sheet over them. However, the sheet was often removed or pulled back and was not an effective screen or cover.

8. Mr. Gay stated that he remained at this reeducation camp for ARVN enlisted personnel for one night. The entire next day, he and the six ARVN officers travelled by foot and sampan to a reeducation camp for RVNAF company grade officers. He spent about a month in that camp; then was moved by sampan with three ARVN officers, including LtCol Thoai, in what he described as an arduous 24 hour journey by sampan to Can Tho City.

9. At Can Tho he was placed in a large detention camp for RVNAF field grade officers near an airfield which he believed to have been called "Quan Lo". He was held there for approximately four months. During his detention there, his wife was allowed to visit on two occasions, at which times she brought food and one set of black pajamas. During his last three weeks at Quan Lo he was released from his individual cell and allowed to mingle openly with other inmates in the main compound. He briefly sighted a young (approximately 30 years old) caucasian being taken into a separate section of the camp but could not provide a name or physical description for the caucasian. In an earlier debriefing he had stated that he had heard from other inmates that the caucasian was a young Frenchman who was from the family that brewed "Beer 33". Neither Mr. Gay nor his wife recognized the name Thierry Grandjean, who may have had some connection with "Beer 33" interests in Vietnam. Mr. Gay noted that there were approximately 700 field grade officer inmates at Quan Lo. Most were visited by wives or relatives who were an essential source of food, medicine, or clothing. These relatives also brought in a continuous flow of current information regarding events in the delta. Mr. Gay stated that he had continuous and effective communication with other inmates during his detention at Quan Lo. Mr Gay and his wife expressed their belief that had any other Americans been captured in the delta region, he or his wife would have heard about it. As examples: he heard about the "black American" (Mr. Herman McDonald) almost immediately in Quan Lo and Mrs. Gay was able to locate and visit Mr. Gay. Neither Mr. or Mrs. Gay had heard of any incidents in which Americans were captured, detained, or killed anywhere outside of Saigon, with the single exception of Mr. McDonald.

10. Neither Mr. Gay or his wife recognized the following Vietnamese units, which are believed to have had some responsibilities for reeducation camps: Doan 700, Doan 776, and Doan 875. Mr. Gay stated that he was always detained under the control of the Vietnamese military but never learned the identity of the military units.

11. When asked about a specific placename (Xeo Ro) described by a Vietnamese refugee as being in the area of Rach Gia, but which we could not locate, Mr. Gay stated that it was a somewhat shifting sandbar near the mouth of the main river channel from the sea into Rach Soi.

12. Mr. Gay was extremely cooperative and answered a myriad of questions to the best of his ability. When asked if we could do anything for him, he requested to know if our office could do anything to help his wife's sister legally immigrate from Vietnam. We stated that we could not offer any official assistance. Mr. Gay explained that he and his wife had prepared a number of forms that they received from the US Catholic Conference (USCC) and were about to send them to the appropriate US Government offices. We advised that he should proceed with this effort through official government channels. We offered to pass Mr. Gay's name and address to an acquaintance in Bangkok; and we emphasized that we did not know if this person (whom we did not identify) could or would be of any assistance to Mr. Gay. Mr. Gay stated that he would continue to pursue the matter through official channels.

Edward D. Valentine

Ed Valentine
IRS/GS-12

Robert Destatte

Robert Destatte
IRS/GS-12