Oral History
Le Tu Dong

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ADMINISTRATIVE MESSAGE

ROUTINE

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AMPN/SUBJ/INTERVIEW OF REQUESTED SOURCE, LE TU DONG//

REF/A/FAX/DET 2/16MAY93//

AMPN/SUBJ: LIST OF PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW-SENATOR KERRY, ENTRY NUMBER 32 OF 83//

RMKS/1. BACKGROUND. ON 21 JULY 1993, A JOINT U.S./VIETNAM ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM INTERVIEW TEAM INTERVIEWED MR. LE TU DONG, A 75 YEAR OLD HUE RESIDENT. MR. DONG IS CURRENTLY CHAIRMAN OF THE THUA THIEN - HUE PROVINCE VIETNAMESE VETERAN'S ASSOCIATION, FORMERLY A LIEUTENANT GENERAL, SECRETARY OF THE REGION PARTY COMMITTEE, AND COMMANDER OF MILITARY REGION TRI-THIEN-HUE (MR-TTH). THE TEAM MET AT THE HUE PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE GUEST HOUSE, 2 LE LOI STREET, HUE CITY, TO INTERVIEW MR. DONG, LISTED IN REFERENCE AS A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF INFORMATION CONCERNING U.S. PERSONNEL MISSING IN ACTION (MIA) IN VIETNAM. THE U.S. CONTINGENT CONSISTED OF MR. [redacted], DET 2, JOINT TASK FORCE-FULL ACCOUNTING (JTF-FA) CASUALTY RESOLUTION SPECIALIST; AND PO2 [redacted], JTF-FA ANALYST/LINGUIST. THE VIETNAMESE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT CONTINGENT CONSISTED OF LTC LE KY, MINISTRY OF DEFENSE; AND MR. TRINH QUOC KHANH, MINISTRY OF

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INTERIOR. MR. DONG HAD NOT BEEN INTERVIEWED BY A JOINT TEAM BEFORE.

2. SUMMARY. THE SOURCE, MR. LE TU DONG, PROVIDED NO INFORMATION CONCERNING U.S. PERSONNEL MISSING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. HE SUMMARIZED HIS MILITARY CAREER AND SHARED HIS VIEWS ON THE U.S. PRISONER OF WAR (PW)/MIA ISSUE. HE PROVIDED INFORMATION RELATING TO VIETNAMESE POLICY CONCERNING THE TAKING OF U.S. PRISONERS ON THE BATTLEFIELD OF MR-TTH. MR. DONG OFFERED THE HELP OF THE THUA THIEN - HUE VETERAN'S ASSOCIATIONS OF QUANG BINH AND QUANG TRI PROVINCES WITH THE HOPE OF RESOLVING SOME U.S. MIA CASES. THE SOURCE CLAIMED NO KNOWLEDGE OF U.S. PERSONNEL LIVING FREELY OR AGAINST THEIR WILL IN VIETNAM SINCE 1973.

3. DETAILS.

A. AFTER FORMAL INTRODUCTIONS, LTC LE KY EXPLAINED THE JOINT TEAM'S MISSION AND MR. [redacted] BEGAN THE INTERVIEW WITH THE FOLLOWING TWO KEY QUESTIONS:

(1) SINCE 1973, HAVE YOU EVER SEEN OR HAD KNOWLEDGE OF U.S. PW'S CAPTIVE IN VIETNAM? MR. DONG REPLIED THAT HE HAD NEITHER SEEN NOR HEARD OF ANY PW'S IN VIETNAM SINCE 1973. HE ALSO OPINED THAT THE VIETNAMESE KEPT NO AMERICAN PRISONERS IN VIETNAM AFTER 1973.

(2) SINCE 1973, HAVE YOU EVER SEEN OR HAD KNOWLEDGE OF AMERICAN "STAY-BEHINDS" IN VIETNAM? MR. DONG SAID THERE WERE NO AMERICAN STAY-BEHINDS IN VIETNAM FOLLOWING 1973. MR. DONG EXPLAINED THAT THE VIETNAMESE WAY OF LIFE IS MUCH TOO DIFFICULT FOR WESTERNERS AND HE CAN NOT IMAGINE WHY AN AMERICAN WOULD WANT TO STAY IN VIETNAM. UNTIL NOW, MR. DONG STATED, HE HAD NOT GIVEN THIS PARTICULAR OPTION MUCH THOUGHT.

B. HAVING ANSWERED THE FIRST TWO KEY QUESTIONS, MR. LE TU DONG (LEE TWJ DOONGF) SAID THAT IN 1937 HE JOINED THE ANTI-FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY FORCES OPERATING IN THE HUE REGION AND WAS IMPRISONED BY THE FRENCH IN 1940. HE SAID THAT FOLLOWING HIS RELEASE IN 1945 HE REJOINED THE REVOLUTIONARY FORCES IN HUE, WHERE HE STAYED FOR THE NEXT NINE YEARS. MR. DONG SAID HE WAS SENT TO HANOI TO BE AN INSTRUCTOR IN 1954 AND BETWEEN 1969 AND 1973 WAS A STUDENT IN RUSSIA. IT WAS NOT UNTIL 1973, THAT HE DIRECTLY PARTICIPATED IN THE WAR.

C. MR. DONG SAID THAT HE ARRIVED IN MR-TTH IN 1973 TO BEGIN PREPARING TO TAKE COMMAND OF THE REGION. BY THIS TIME, HE SAID, ALL U.S. TROOPS HAD WITHDRAWN FROM THE REGION AND ALL SURVIVING U.S. PW'S HAD BEEN SENT TO THE NORTH. HE ALSO SAID THAT ALL RECORDS CONCERNING AMERICAN PRISONERS WOULD HAVE BEEN SENT TO THE MR-TTH STAFF HEADQUARTERS POLITICAL OFFICE AND ON UP THE CHAIN OF COMMAND TO HANOI. MR. DONG SAID THAT WHILE COMMANDING MR-TTH, HE RELIED HEAVILY ON THE EXPERIENCED CADRE SUBORDINATE TO HIM, SOME

OF THEM HAVING BEEN IN THE AREA SINCE 1966. MR. DONG REMEMBERED ONLY NGUYEN XUAN HOANG (SEE PARA. 5.A.) AS ONE OF THESE CADRE.

D. MR. [redacted] ASKED ABOUT THE VIETNAMESE POLICY FOR TAKING AND MOVING PRISONERS IN MR-TTH. MR. DONG SAID THAT THE ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (ARVN) FORCES DID RECEIVE U.S. SUPPORT FOLLOWING 1973 AND HE IS UNAWARE OF ANY DIRECT U.S. INVOLVEMENT AFTER 1973. MR. DONG SAID THAT PRIOR TO 1973, DUE TO HIT AND RUN TACTICS EMPLOYED IN MR-TTH, IT IS HIGHLY PROBABLE THAT THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE VIETNAMESE TROOPS BURIED OR LEFT U.S. SERVICE MEN LYING ON A BATTLE FIELD WITHOUT FIRST IDENTIFYING THEM. HE SAID THAT HE BELIEVES THERE MAY BE NO WAY TO ACCOUNT FOR THESE U.S. TROOPS. MR. DONG EXPLAINED THAT IS WAS NECESSARY TO GET OUT OF A BATTLE AREA AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE OR RISK BEING BOMBED BY U.S FORCES. MR. DONG SAID THAT IF AN AMERICAN WAS TAKEN PRISONER, THE VIETNAMESE TROOPS WERE ORDERED TO TREAT THE PRISONER IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VIETNAMESE HUMANITARIAN POLICY; EXTRACT VITAL INFORMATION, TREAT THE PRISONER'S WOUNDS, FEED HIM, AND SEND HIM TO THE NORTH. MR-TTH DID NOT, HE STRESSED HAVE PW CAMPS. HE SAID THAT PRIOR TO 1973 HE WAS AWARE OF PRISONER HOLDING PLACES, SUCH AS THE HANOI HILTON IN THE NORTH, BUT THESE PLACES WERE NOT HIS SPECIALTY AND THEREFORE NOT HIS CONCERN.

E. MR. [redacted] PRESENTED THE GENERAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF LOSS RELATING TO CASES 1402, 1086, AND 1748. MR. DONG SAID THAT HE HAS NO KNOWLEDGE OF THESE, OR ANY OTHER SPECIFIC INCIDENTS, BUT OFFERED THE NAMES TRAN LUU CHU AND TRAN VIET HA (SEE PARA. 5.B,C.) AS POSSIBLY HAVING INFORMATION RELATING TO CASE 1402. HE CONCEDED THAT THERE IS MUCH INFORMATION THAT MAY YET BE GAINED BY PURSUING THESE CASES. MR. DONG SAID THAT HE IS THE CHAIRMAN OF THE THUA THIEN-HUE PROVINCE VETERAN'S ASSOCIATION. HE SAID THAT HIS VETERAN'S ASSOCIATION HAS FOLLOWED THE MIA PROBLEM FROM BOTH SIDES AND ALTHOUGH IT IS RELATIVELY LATE, HE WILL ASK THE MEMBERS

TO CONSULT THEIR DIARIES AND TRY TO REMEMBER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MAY HAVE LEAD TO AN AMERICAN LOSS. MR. DONG CONTINUED TO SAY THAT HE KNOWS THE CHAIRMEN OF THE QUANG BINH AND QUANG TRI PROVINCES' VETERAN'S ASSOCIATIONS VERY WELL. THEY TOO, HE SAID, CERTAINLY WILL HELP WITH THE SEARCH FOR MIA'S. MR. DONG VOLUNTEERED TO ASSIST IN GAINING THE ASSISTANCE OF THE VETERANS
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OF THE TWO OTHER PROVINCES.

F. WITH NO FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR MR. DONG, THE JOINT TEAM AGREED TO CONCLUDE THE INTERVIEW.

4. CORRELATIONS TO EXISTING POW/MIA CASES. NONE.

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5. POTENTIAL LEADS.

A. MR. NGUYEN XUAN HOANG (NGUYEENX XUAAN HOANGF), MR. DONG SAID, WAS AN EXPERIENCED MR-TTH CADRE. HE SAID THAT MR. HOANG WORKED IN THE POLITICAL DIRECTORATE AND COULD HAVE BEEN HELPFUL IN GATHERING FURTHER MIA INFORMATION, BUT MR. HOANG DIED IN 1987. MR. HOANG IS ALSO NUMBER 32 OF REF.

B. TRAN LUU CHU (TRAANF LWU CHUR), MR. DONG SAID, IS NOW A RETIRED SENIOR COLONEL (SRCOL), AND MAY HAVE INFORMATION CONCERNING CASE 1402.

C. TRAN VIET HA (TRAANF VIEETJ HAF), MR. DONG SAID, IS NOW A RETIRED SRCOL, FORMERLY A DEPUTY COMMANDER AND POLITICAL OFFICER, AND MAY HAVE INFORMATION CONCERNING CASE 1402.

6. MATERIAL EVIDENCE: NONE. THIS SOURCE BROUGHT NO RECORDS, NOTEBOOKS, DIARIES, OR ANY MATERIAL EVIDENCE ASSOCIATED WITH UNACCOUNTED FOR U.S. PERSONNEL.

7. COMMENTS.

A. MR. DONG EXPRESSED HIS SYMPATHY FOR THE FAMILIES OF U.S. SERVICEMEN WHO ARE STILL MISSING IN VIETNAM AND HE SAID THAT HE HOPES THEY CAN UNDERSTAND THAT MANY OF THOSE LOST IN THE LAOTIAN BORDER AREA MAY NOT EVER BE FOUND. HE SAID THAT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO KNOW WHERE YOU ARE WHEN IN A JUNGLE REGION AS MOUNTAINOUS AND RUGGED AS THE LAOTIAN BORDER AREA. OFTEN, HE SAID, THE PEOPLE'S ARMY OF VIETNAM (PAVN) FORCES ONLY KNEW THAT THEY HAD TO MOVE FOR A NUMBER OF DAYS IN A CERTAIN DIRECTION TO REACH THEIR GOAL AND DID NOT KNOW FOR CERTAIN WHERE THEY WERE. ADDED TO THIS, HE SAID, WAS THE CONSTANT CONFUSION BROUGHT BY AMERICAN BOMBING OF THE AREA. THIS BOMBING AND 20 YEARS OF HARSH RAINS IN THE AREA MAKE FINDING AN ISOLATED GRAVE A NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TASK. HE EXPLAINED THAT HE HAD TRAVELED TO THE REGION, FOLLOWING THE WAR, TO FIND HIS OWN BROTHER'S GRAVE. HE SAID THAT HE HAD KNOWN EXACTLY WHERE THE GRAVE SITE WAS, BUT AFTER CUTTING THROUGH THE JUNGLE FOR THREE DAYS, HE WAS UNABLE TO LOCATE IT. THE GRAVES MAY JUST NOT BE DETECTABLE, HE SAID, AND THE AMERICANS MAY NOT CLEARLY UNDERSTAND THE DIFFICULTIES INVOLVED.

B. THE MEMBERS OF THE JOINT TEAM CONFERRED ON THE QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED DURING THIS INTERVIEW. TEAM MEMBERS AGREED THAT THE NEED TO REINTERVIEW THIS SUBJECT WOULD DEPEND ON WHETHER FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR MR. DONG ARISE DURING THE COURSE OF THE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW TEAM'S FUTURE WORK.

C. REQUEST THE VNOSMP MAKE MR. DONG AVAILABLE FOR REINTERVIEW OR TO ASSIST WITH THE VETERAN'S ASSOCIATION IF NECESSARY.//

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