

BOB SMITH
NEW HAMPENAI

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20540-3903

EXCERPT FROM MEETING WITH GENERAL POLITICAL DIRECTORATE OF THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENSE

HANOI, SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
FRIDAY, 2:00 P.M., DECEMBER 18, 1993

SMITH: General, first of all, thank you for meeting with us. We appreciate that very much. I have four questions that perhaps you or your staff could help us with.

The first question, many of the American prisoners in your custody were filmed. Sometimes during and after capture. Any films that you would have today in your archives that would be of American prisoners when they were in your custody could be helpful in identifying or accounting for various prisoners. The question is, or would you be willing to...

SMITH: Thank you for the answer to the first question. The second question is also regarding prisoners that you had in your prison system that were not returned nor were their remains returned. There are several such cases...we are providing you a list of these people...

I have one more question and I would like to ask Colonel Y a question if possible. General, are you or any of your colleagues aware of you have a separate prison system for the prisoners who came from Laos? Did you separate them from the prisoners who were captured in Vietnam?

(response not translated -- unclear)

Colonel Y, you knew Robert Garwood. And he indicated to us, on our committee, that he was not allowed to come home in 1973. Is that accurate?

I would like to answer your two questions. The first one, regarding the prison system in Vietnam, I have already discussed this with Mr. Deslatte. As far as I know, there is no system for keeping American prisoners captured in Vietnam. You see that due to the difficulties in Laos at that time, we had to... the safety and protection to the American prisoners captured... the request of the Lao government, some of the... to Vietnam. They were kept with the... captured in Vietnam.

Correctly
SIC

SMITH: How many were brought to Vietnam?

COLONEL Y: I do not remember. At that time, I was acting as interpreter for the Lao delegation. At that time, Mr. Bell was acting as your interpreter. Usually, in the capacity of interpretations, I was only for Vietnam.

SMITH: I realize it's been a long time. But how many do you estimate were not brought to Vietnam, that the Lao either did not let you have or...how many captured POWs do you estimate did not come to Vietnam.

COLONEL Y: At this time, I was not concerned about this problem. Because you see, under such conditions, only North Vietnam was the most safe place to the Lao Government, so under such circumstances, we think that all the American prisoners captured in Laos were brought to Vietnam and were returned to the United States. I think the Lao Government pays special attention to Americans captured in their territory. That is why they allowed us to bring them to our territory. That is the first question.

The second question regarding the Garwood case. I think that I have given my answer many times regarding this issue. There was one time that I knew him in 1972 or 1973. I do not remember exactly. At that time, I received an order from my superior. To bring an American down to Hanoi. At that time, I knew his name. His Vietnamese name at that time was "...". Working at the place, my superior didn't expect that I could manage some English with Mr. Garwood. But Mr. Garwood proposed to speak in Vietnamese. Because one of the things that he was most afraid of was to forget English.

I think that Garwood is not the one that I have to pay special attention to, but the thing that he mentioned to me at that time drew my attention. Because I was deeply moved when he mentioned to me that he was missing his country very much. My regular superior at that time explained to me clearly the case of Garwood. He said that Garwood was a defector, not a prisoner. He surrendered to our side...he was trying to help us in many things. I also proposed to him if he wanted to, he could return to his country at any time he wanted to. Actually, he had his own freedom of movement in our country, in Hanoi.

That's all that I understand regarding the Garwood case.

SMITH: I just wanted to understand. He did not request to go home in 1973 at the end of the war.

COLONEL Y: That's what I understood. You see one thing I'm sure about is that he wanted very much to return home. Because our responsibility for him was difficult at that time. And because if he returned to the United States, everything would be fine for him.

SMITH: Garwood said that he saw American prisoners after...

COLONEL Y: I have told Destatte many times regarding this question...I was not a high ranking officer in Vietnam at that time. But I suggest to you that the best idea is to bring Garwood to Vietnam...

SMITH: General, I have just one question for you. Was there ever a prison facility of any kind housing American prisoners or foreign prisoners on an island in Thac Ba Lake?

VIETNAMESE (THRU THEIR INTERPRETER) You see that was the prison for the Saigon troops who were captured and were kept there.

SMITH: So there was a prison on an island in this lake for South Vietnamese prisoners?

VIETNAMESE: Yes, for South Vietnamese prisoners.

DESTATTE: Dino, I'm afraid there's a misunderstanding. Our Vietnamese friends are referring to Thac Ba Lake. Mr. Smith is referring to an island in Thac Ba Lake. Big difference.

VIETNAMESE: You see in that small island of Thac Ba Lake, Mr. (???) has already let some of you see that lake.

SMITH: I understand there is nothing there now.

VIETNAMESE: After the war, we kept the former Saigon troops there for education.

KERRY: Not on the island, at the lake. Not on the island.

SMITH: At the lake, was their one...

VIETNAMESE: In the middle of the lake.

SMITH: In the middle of the lake.

VIETNAMESE: Some of you have already gone to see that island, and I myself led that group to see that island, and we have photos and all.

SMITH: (to Destatte) I'm sorry guys, but that's not what you told me. This is a big deal here.

DESTATTE: But truly there is a misunderstanding here.

KERRY: Now, wait a minute. He just said it's in the middle of the lake.

(to Vietnamese) Is there a Lake, what's the Lake, Thac Ba Lake? And so the island is the lake?

(Vietnamese nod affirmatively)

VIETNAMESE: There are many small islands which can be seen from the aircraft.

KERRY: Was there a prison on one of those islands ever?

VIETNAMESE: From 1975 to the end of 1978, there was a group of small prisons, you see, in that island in that lake. Camp Six. Camp Six. The Commander of that camp was born in Hauen (sic.) province, and after the war, he retired to his homeland in Hauen (sic) province. If you want to interview him, that can be arranged. I think that you misunderstood something. From 1975 to 1978, Garwood, he was sometimes was working for that camp. You see he was in charge of the electr. eh...generator... He thought there was some people...

KERRY: What's the deal here? Garwood says he saw people there?

SMITH: I'll talk to you about it later.

KERRY: Well, no, let talk...

SMITH: I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to talk about it.

BRUNIG: We can ask General...

VIETNAMESE: How much time do you have?

KERRY: Dino, what's the issue here?

CASRUCCIO: It's not the right environment.

BRUNIG: But we should ask them...

SMITH: Were there ever Americans in that facility of any kind, 'or caucasians?

VIETNAMESE: No Americans.

SMITH: Any foreigners?

VIETNAMESE: I don't think there was.

KERRY: ... we have an agreement since there's some confusion on our side and it's our confusion, can we agree to reinvestigate that in January with a different group of people?

VIETNAMESE: (unclear)

SMITH: ... which means no.

SMITH: ... (unclear)

VIETNAMESE: We are losing time...

KERRY: I know and I would like to...

(wherein the delegation departed for its next meeting).