

Date: Sun, 16 Jul 1995 08:41:15 -0400

From:

To: Stephen R Denney

Subject: Re: What Happened to Billy Hendon?

FILE

SUBJ

DATE

SUB-CAT

JUL.

1995

Yes, Hendon was on AIM's TV program stating that he had been shipped out of Vietnam, persona non grata and that the POW-MIA investigators allegedly went to the site he wanted checked out about two weeks after he left. They found nothing! However, Hendon claims that the picture shown of their effort shows no mountain and that they did not in fact go to the mountain site. Richard Kania

## Billy Hendon Stirs Up Trouble

JUN. 1995

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Billy Hendon, 50, a former Republican congressman from North Carolina and now a MIA consultant, has been trying to convince anyone that would listen that there are American prisoners of War still being held at a secret location in Northern Vietnam. Funded by an American veterans' bikers club, Hendon traveled to Asia early this spring. He was denied a visa from the Vietnamese government to enter the country, and he was given no assistance in his efforts by U.S. officials in Bangkok. Eventually however, he did enter Vietnam on a transit visa and began to demand that U.S. officials meet with him and eventually follow him to the site of the prison. He refused to tell officials the location of the prison or provide any more pertinent information.

On Saturday, June 3, he handcuffed himself to the front gate of the U.S. MIA office in Hanoi, telling reporters that, "I came here today to take the experts to the exact point where the Americans are being held. Nothing political, purely humanitarian," the Associated Press reported. He said that he used the handcuffs because he feared for his safety. Army Lieutenant Colonel Melvin, Richmond, commander of the office, used bolt cutters to free Hendon from the gate, whereupon he immediately chained himself to another gate with a second pair of handcuffs.

The next day, Hendon met with U.S. officials at his hotel. He refused to hand over any information because he said that the information would be given to the Vietnamese by the Americans. Richmond assured him that the information would go through normal U.S. procedures for investigating POW/MIA reports. Richmond said that his office would not receive the information with reporters present and observed that his office has investigated over 90 live sighting cases since January, 1992, without one of them producing a prisoner of war. Vietnam maintains that all prisoners were turned over in 1973, but Defense Department documents quote Vietnamese refugees and other sources as saying that 200-300 Americans were held at a underground prison near a top security, mountain military base called Hung Hoa, 50 miles northwest of Hanoi, as late as 1984, the Associated Press reported. Hendon insisted that an intelligence contact in Thailand assured him that he had seen the prisoners at Hung Hoa in February; Hendon would not name the contact or the original source. He said, "We have what we consider to be irrefutable proof of American prisoners held now in this mountain prison." Hendon, a long-time POW/MIA activist, knew that any confirmation that Vietnam held American prisoners for the past 22 years would be "political dynamite in Washington and sabotage attempts by Hanoi and its U.S. supporters to persuade President Clinton to normalize relations," according to Reuters.

On Monday, June 5, after officials of the MIA office once again refused to meet with him with reporters present, Hendon again handcuffed himself to the gate where he remained for about ten hours until the office closed; then he removed the handcuffs. Up until then, the Vietnamese government had said little, but the second handcuffing incident prompted the Foreign Ministry to say that Hendon was spreading "ill-intentioned information for the purpose of hampering progress in U.S. Vietnamese relations," Reuters reported. U.S. officials decided to call in an investigative specialist.

By June 7, the clock was ticking for Hendon's visa, and he went to the liaison office to seek help in gaining an extension. U.S. officials waited for him upstairs, he waited downstairs with the reporters. There was no meeting, and he went back to the hotel to fax an extension request to senior Vietnamese officials. While Richardson accused Hendon of manipulating the press, a group of seven U.S. war veterans living in Vietnam accused Hendon of exploiting the

MIA issue and of inventing the story to try to obstruct normalization. POW activists in the U.S. telephoned reporters in Hanoi with their backing for Hendon. U.S. activists threatened to come to Vietnam as tourists to join Hendon in his protest. Hendon told the press, "I'm in my hotel, and I ain't moving until they bring the four-wheel-drive. I want the four-wheel-drive to pull up out front. I'm waiting to go to the prison, not the airport," Reuters reported. He also began a hunger strike.

Vietnam War veterans working in Vietnam were dismayed by Hendon's behavior, and eight of them sent an open letter calling Hendon's actions "regrettable, offensive, and obstructive," the Associated Press reported.

On June 8, the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry sent Hendon a letter declaring him a *persona non grata* and informing him that he had to leave the country by Friday, June 9. He also had a "firm but friendly" talk with the Hanoi police. His visa expired on June 8. The letter also stated that, "Your behavior has not contributed to solving the MIA issue. Moreover, it harms the process of good cooperation between Vietnam and the United States." The Foreign Ministry accused Hendon of "carrying out anti-order activities," breaking the law, and impeding the work of the U.S. MIA office in Hanoi. He told reporters that, "I don't want to cause them any problems, and I'm even happy for there to be full normalization between Vietnam and the U.S.--but only if they visit that damn prison," the *South China Morning Post* reported. Finally, Hendon left Vietnam on Saturday.

After finally receiving Hendon's information by fax, U.S. officials forwarded it to Washington and were told to ask Vietnam for permission to visit the site of the alleged secret prison. Hendon was elated, calling the U.S. action a "big breakthrough." He added, "The powerful pictures coming out of Bosnia left the policy-makers with no choice; you simply can't do everything possible to rescue a brave pilot in Bosnia while ignoring the fate of the brave pilots in an underground prison inside a mountain in Vietnam," Reuters reported. The Vietnamese government gave permission to search the site.

Senior Colonel Tran Bien, two other Vietnamese officials, and a reporter initially accompanied three U.S. officials to Huong Non Village on June 19, looking for the prison. They traveled for over two hours in jeeps through rice-farming villages and small towns. There no mountains in Huong Non village nor in neighboring Hung Hoa village. In fact, there are no mountains for miles. Lead investigator Bill Hutchinson, who flew to Vietnam from Thailand to lead this search, said, "I don't think there's anything like that in this area." After six hours of work, Colonel Tran told them, "If there were a real possibility, I would have to go with you. But there isn't anything, so you can just go." He left, and the Americans proceeded in their hunt. Tran Van Tu, a Foreign Ministry official who remained with the group of investigators, called the expedition a waste of time, adding, "There are no prisoners here, but there are a lot of stories, and they (the Americans) insist, so it's OK," the Associated Press reported. The place that Hendon said the prison was located was a rice paddy in the lowlands. Special U.S. investigator Bill Hutchinson said, "We're going to have to go over there and ask that farmer if he knows of any holes in the ground, so to speak," the Associated Press reported. None of the farmers knew anything. Two villages were searched and no secret prison or prisoners of war were found. One villager after another laughed when they were asked about mountains and caves. One farmer, Do Nhieu, 71, said, when asked if he had seen any American prisoners, "Oh, my God, you must be kidding." The only military facility within a seven-mile radius was a walled truck depot. Lieutenant Colonel Melvin Richmond, head of the military unit in Hanoi, said the searchers used satellite links and electronic positioning devices to determine the location

from the exact geographical coordinates Hendon supplied. Richmond added, "He can say whatever he wants about it being a convenient sham or whatever, but if we didn't go to the right place, it's because he didn't give us the right information. I don't think there was anything like Mr. Hendon's prison in that area," Reuters reported. It is interesting to note that Hendon visited Huong Non and Hung Hoa in April, 1994, including the rice field he later identified as the alleged prison site. He had not been allowed inside the truck depot because he had not applied for permission in advance. The area near Hung Hoa was bombed by U.S. planes in 1972. Ten days later, Senator Bob Smith (R, N.H.) and his allies wrote to U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry asking to send investigators on an official plane coming to Vietnam over the 4th of July weekend for a new probe of a claim that POWs are being held in the underground prison

Kathy Wilhelm, writing for the Associated Press noted, "Over the last three years, the U.S. government has spent more than \$54 million searching Vietnamese archives, interviewing Vietnamese veterans and peasants, and digging up old battlefields and plane crash sites. Certainty eludes them. Vietnam is almost as big as California, with rugged mountains and thick jungle creating countless remote places where prisoners could be hidden. Investigators could search the entire 1,050 mile length of the country without being able to prove that POWs were not hidden anywhere...Certainly it was unlikely, after all the years of Vietnamese denial, for the investigators, a reported, and three Vietnamese escorts to drive up to a village, ask to see its secret prison, and be shown cells of Americans in their 40s and 50s...The investigators found no mountains, no multiple rings of security, no forbidden military zones--just paddies along the Red river backed by rolling, low clay hills." "As many of the investigators often say, "You can't prove a negative." Not surprisingly, the number of live sightings has decreased. As one European diplomat put it, "I don't think anyone neutral can seriously believe that an investigation will yield a bunch of middle-aged Americans struggling into the sunlight." Agence France Press observed that Billy Hendon "has relentlessly courted publicity for his claims but has never produced any evidence."

Perhaps John Rogers, writing for Reuters, summed the incident up the best when he said, "Billy Hendon is exactly the sort of guy you don't want turning up on our doorstep at a crucial stage in a long, slow, painful reconciliation. He makes a lot of noise and asks awkward questions of the 'when did you stop beating your wife?' variety, calculated to derail the relationship. Even if the answers are innocuous, just posing the question brings back memories that would-be partners would prefer buried and gives ammunition to those trying to keep them apart." ("Activist Tramples Tender Shoots of U.S. Hanoi Ties," June 11, 1995.)

From: wittman@cakton.edu Tue Jul 18 08:24:16 1995  
Date: Sat. 15 Jul 1995 17:03:44 -0500 (CDT)  
From: Sandra Wittman  
To: Stephen R Dennis  
Subject: Re: Hendon

*Ben*  
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DATE SUB-CAT  
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Hi--if you want me to send you the citations for the articles. I'd be glad to do that. I do a newsletter for 50 of us that went to VN with CIEE in '92 and I wrote an article on Hendon. I search just on the work "Vietnam" but I could send you the dates if that would make it easier. Ap is file 258, AFP is 611, Reuters is 611, and I can't remember what SCMP is right now and I am home so I don't have the number handy. I have never searched PR Newswire--just too much news as it is--but it's on dialog too. Do you get on the World Wide Web? There's incredible stuff on VN there.

Best wishes--

--Sandy