

POWs and Politics: How Much does Hanoi Really Know
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Overview

The recent diplomatic recognition of Vietnam, along with the lifting of the economic embargo, offers an opportunity to re-examine one of the most pernicious legacies of the Vietnam War, the POW/MIA dilemma. Two decades after the war ended, the POW/MIA issue continues to divide Americans in a manner reminiscent of the war itself. Recently, the Department of Defense's (DOD) office responsible for POW/MIAs, called the Defense Prisoner/Missing in Action Office (DPMO), undertook a year long review of all the remaining MIA cases to establish a base line for future efforts.¹ Their summary states “we have found it exceedingly difficult to predict the extent to which evidence of accountability by Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia about some aspect of a U.S. loss could lead to an accounting of the individual.”²

Contrary to the government's current position, MIA family members and activist groups continue to maintain that Vietnamese wartime policy mandated keeping highly detailed records of incidents involving captured American personnel. Many families believe that the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP)(formerly the *Lao Dong* Party) controlling the POW/MIA issue in Indochina could rapidly account for many more U.S. POW/MIAs. Obviously, that postwar accounting has not taken place, resulting in a twenty year climate of political controversy and suspicion of the motives of both governments involved. This suspicion among the POW/MIA families over Vietnamese actions was directly created from prior Vietnamese intransigence on accounting for American servicemen, a suspicion further aroused when U.S. government spokespersons label current Vietnamese POW/MIA cooperation as “superb” and “outstanding.”

This paper seeks to outline the roles of the various Vietnamese organizations responsible for handling American POWs, and examines the impact of VCP policy on this issue. In doing so, the authors will attempt to determine whether the U.S. government's characterization of Vietnamese cooperation as “superb” is warranted. The paper does not discuss the possibility of Americans remaining in captivity after the completion of “Operation Homecoming.”

To accomplish our goal, the paper is divided into two basic sections. The first part discusses the Vietnamese organs which processed POWs and outlines the known wartime Vietnamese communist POW policies. We will scrutinize these communist policies and organs through a wealth of declassified interrogation reports, numerous captured enemy documents, and several CIA studies on the Vietnamese intelligence services. In reviewing this material, a consistent theme emerges of VCP policies that placed a heavy emphasis on the use of remains for economic concessions, and prisoners and their documentation for use in propaganda, intelligence gathering, and political negotiations. Additionally, using recent Oral History interviews of Vietnamese cadre involved in the processing of American POWs and remains conducted by one of the authors and other members of the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA), we will sketch out what we believe is a disregarded and ignored aspect of the Vietnamese POW system.

The second part discusses whether the U.S. government claim regarding Vietnamese cooperation on solving the POW/MIA issue is deserved, and highlights the actions and contacts of some U.S. government officials who have pressed for improved relations with Vietnam. We do not disagree that current levels of access and activity are far superior to previous years, nor are we quarreling with obviously increased administrative and logistical cooperation. Instead, our view of cooperation revolves

around defining a U.S. national policy based upon genuine results, rather than just activity, such as re-excavating crash sites previously excavated by the Vietnamese years ago, and then generating JTF-FA statistics that are then used to create an illusion of increased progress. If a young serviceman digging at a crash site breaks his shovel, and after requesting a new one from his Vietnamese counterpart receives it right away, that may be superb cooperation at his level, but it is not the actions upon which we should base our national POW/MIA policy towards Vietnam.

Finally, we point out the highly unusual movement of former wartime cadre involved in handling American prisoners or their remains into positions dealing with economic and human rights issues, especially those organizations in direct contact with American companies or other associations. The author's believe these cadre are deliberately targeted against American veterans and business organizations to elicit their assistance in furthering the normalization process with Vietnam. Moreover, we will show how the analysis of the U.S. intelligence community, represented by internal studies as late as 1992 using basically the range of materials as the authors, consistently indicated that the Vietnamese could do much to unilaterally resolve the issue. When pressed in recent Congressional testimony, experienced DPMO analysts continue to express the same viewpoints. However, the Clinton Administration has backed away from that position, a policy that we believe is politically driven by desires to open up trade, and curry favor with major American corporations prior to the 1996 general elections. In terms of diplomatic links, we believe the current Administration, despite their rhetoric, views the POW/MIA issue as an implausible one that is seriously retarding relations with an important regional power.

Given the current apathy over the POW/MIA issue, why is it necessary to re-address this issue? Once the Paris Peace Agreement was signed and the American prisoners repatriated, most Americans thought the issue was settled. However, since "Operation Homecoming," for the MIA family members, the issue has not faded and has not been resolved to their satisfaction, especially after Democratic of Vietnam (DRV) wartime actions regarding American prisoners became well documented. Those actions ranged from a refusal to allow ICRC inspections of POW camps, the use of brutal torture, and to denial and stonewalling regarding information on Americans missing in action. In terms of postwar results, from 1975 through 1990, few would argue that Vietnamese POW/MIA cooperation was anything but grudging.

To the average citizen, the maneuvering of the various U.S. political and business factions surrounding the POW/MIA issue are undoubtedly confusing and distasteful. For an American raised in the relatively simple aspects of democratic politics, trying to understand Vietnamese communist bureaucracies and policy is often a narrow, dull, and highly technical task. The Vietnamese wartime organs responsible for POWs were complicated entities, often ignored or only dimly understood. Unfortunately, two mediums which normally help shape public opinion, the media and the academic community, have been notably absent from this acrimonious debate. Little has been published by U.S. scholars concerning the actual mechanisms, systems, and policies the Vietnamese communists used to process American POWs.³ Reasoned discussion has alternated between the two polar extremes of unsubstantiated theorizing by various individuals, and the defensive, almost knee-jerk denials from the U.S. government when faced with any criticism. The U.S. intelligence organizations have further compounded the difficulty for any outside reviewer to piece together the outlines of the Vietnamese POW system through a haphazard declassification process, and in the years after the war, through stonewalling on the release of materials. Even after allowing for these complexities, the adversity qualified historians face when dealing in the grey area between national security considerations and public discussions of controversial events does not explain the dearth of scholarly studies on the POW/MIA issue.

While DIA/DPMO has continued to study the Vietnamese prison system to identify the procedures that the communists used to process American POW/MIAs, once allowed access to Vietnam in 1987, it has focused its' primary research efforts on the

Vietnamese military, especially on an organization called the Enemy Proselytizing Department (*Cuc Dich Van*)(EPD) of the Peoples Army of Vietnam (PAVN). This organization reported through the normal military chain of command to a department called the General Political Directorate (*Tong Cuc Chinh Tri*)(GPD) of the PAVN.

However, the authors believe that the systems for the handling of American POWs organized by the VCP were dual-channeled, reflecting on the one hand, DRV security and special intelligence collection, as well short and long-term propaganda concerns, and on the other hand, routine prisoner handling through normal military channels. The authors are not suggesting that DPMO is not aware of the other, different Vietnamese organizations described in this paper, nor do the author's seek to suggest that the DPMO has not given serious consideration to the possibility of a so-called "second prison system." Instead, the authors' believe that the DPMO currently focuses too much of its' efforts on the PAVN, and not enough on VCP channels. We believe that the Vietnamese POW efforts were a delineation of duties between the military forces, the public security forces, and the Party Central Committee Propaganda Organ (*Tuyen Truyen Dao Tao*). This delineation not only prevented duplication of effort, but more importantly, served to compartmentalize the intelligence gathering and overall exploitation effort from a security standpoint, and served both the short and long-term interests of the Party.

The authors' position is that the hidden policy of the VCP is to let the foreign enemy believe that the PAVN possesses the answers to the POW mystery. What the authors hope to demonstrate is the existence of a short-term Vietnamese strategy designed and controlled by the Communist party to use prisoners for either intelligence gathering or propaganda goals, and a longer term program to use their remains or information on the fate of these prisoners to gain political and economic concessions from the enemy. These propaganda and intelligence goals of the Communist Party are the least understood aspect of Vietnamese wartime methodology, and this VCP agenda has had the greatest impact on preventing American postwar POW/MIA accounting efforts. That program included using the POW/MIA issue to sow dissension in the prisoner's home country, a strategy that continues to reverberate among the MIA families and American society today. The ultimate effects on the American public and society from this strategy of emotional manipulation can only be guessed at.

The U.S. Government's Position

Since the middle of the war, the POW/MIA issue has had extraordinary public attention. In terms of national purpose, for the average American the war and its conduct were highly abstract. There was only one clear goal; the return of all U.S. POWs. Notwithstanding Vietnamese claims at the end of "Operation Homecoming" that they had released all the American prisoners they held, serious questions remained regarding Americans known to have been captured but not released or accounted for. Despite repeated U.S. efforts through various forums to achieve answers to these questions, postwar mechanisms designed to account for the remaining missing quickly collapsed.

During the war, the U.S. military placed great emphasis on targeting Vietnamese POW installations and policies, and by 1966 American intelligence was laboring to penetrate the inner workings of the Vietnamese POW prison system. Consequently, an information collection and POW recovery program code-named "Brightlight" was created. Much information on Vietnamese POW procedures was gleaned from interrogations of captured or surrendered Peoples Army of Vietnam (PAVN) or Peoples Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF, or more popularly, Viet Cong) soldiers, and from monitoring North Vietnamese and other East Bloc news broadcasts and publications during the war.⁴ Additionally, Allied forces captured over a million pages of communist documents that provided elaborate details of their plans and personnel.⁵

By the end of the war, after extensive intelligence efforts, and combined with information provided by early American releasees, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) believed it had identified with precision both the numbers and locations where American POWs were being held in North Vietnam. Thus, the returnee debriefs, other still classified wartime intelligence, the "lack of proof" from postwar refugee interviews, and analysis from all-source intelligence information generally forms the basis for DPMO's stated belief that no prisoners remain alive in Southeast Asia.

However, outraged over what many regard as Vietnamese political manipulation of a basic humanitarian issue, an activist community arose, combining veterans of the Vietnam War with more vocal family members. The activists have also continually savaged the U.S. government over its postwar POW/MIA policies and actions, culminating in bitter charges of a politically motivated coverup of evidence indicating the presence of live American prisoners remaining in Vietnamese or Lao custody. Several books, most notably Sauter's and Sander's *Soldiers of Misfortune* and *The Men We Left Behind*, Nigel Cawthorne's *The Bamboo Cage*, and Monika Jensen-Stephenson's *Kiss The Boys Goodbye*, have further developed this conspiracy theory.

The Government has vehemently denied these allegations, and has steadfastly maintained that it possesses no credible evidence that any American servicemen remained as prisoners after "Operation Homecoming." As Vietnam slowly moved towards a free market economy, some U.S. policy makers hoped that the U.S. and Vietnam could re-examine and re-vitalize their strained relationship. These policy makers undoubtedly believed the lingering effects from the war had finally loosened their grip on the attitude of the American public and political elite towards Vietnam. Also, American business leaders, sensing a potential untapped market for U.S. goods and services, hoped to take advantage of the opening of the Vietnamese economy, and began pushing for a settlement of the diplomatic stalemate. By 1989, the Bush Administration had provided Vietnam with a "Road Map" of American requirements for re-establishing economic and political ties. However, the primary U.S. internal roadblock was a satisfactory resolution of the remaining POW/MIA questions.

The hopes of the Bush Administration were dashed, when, in the Spring and Summer of 1991, photos surfaced allegedly depicting Americans still held in captivity. The resultant outcry led to the creation of a Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs to investigate the wartime fate of the 2200 still missing Americans. The widely reported conclusion of the Senate Select Committee was that although evidence existed that as many as 100 men may have remained alive after "Operation Homecoming," no "proof" was found in U.S. government intelligence files to support the stance that men remain alive today, let alone support any wide-ranging conspiracy theory.

Obviously believing itself vindicated in the January 1993 finding of the Senate Select Committee, the DOD has pressed on with its' remains recovery activities in Southeast Asia. These operations are conducted by JTF-FA, an expanded organization from its' prior unit, the Joint Casualty Resolution Center (JCRC). The report went further and counterattacked some of the POW/MIA activists, exposing several fraudulent operators. The recent publication of Susan Katz Keatings' *Prisoners of Hope* and Malcolm McConnell's *Inside Hanoi's Secret Archives*, has swung the pendulum even farther, leaving many of the activist's reputations in public ruin.

Vietnamese POW policies, history, and views

To understand the context of Vietnamese POW policies, it is necessary to understand the motivating philosophies of the VCP. The Vietnamese philosophy of liberation known as *dau tranh*, (literally struggle), evolved into what the Vietnamese termed the "three pronged struggle" comprised of "armed struggle" (*Dau tranh vu trang*), "political struggle" (*Dau tranh chinh tri*),

and “proselytizing” (*van*).⁶ In the English language, the term proselytize means to convert from one belief or faith to another. To the Vietnamese communist, the term came to mean to accept the leadership and doctrine of the Vietnam Communist Party. The concept of the *van* programs were not just propaganda, but was a genuine effort to motivate or shape the perceptions of all elements of the enemy’s military and society. It was just as often designed to influence the perceptions of the North Vietnamese. Unfortunately, while Americans view such motivational material as not worthy of being taken seriously, the enormous communist propaganda machine provided a tremendous undercurrent to the war, and may in fact have been one of the reasons the war was lost.

In transforming the idea of proselytizing into a usable process, which former PAVN Commander Vo Nguyen Giap called “disintegrating the enemy,” or “using the enemy to destroy the enemy,” Party planners divided the members of the opposing forces into two basic categories: the South Vietnamese puppets and the foreign aggressor. The South Vietnamese target was further refined to include categories for Vietnamese servicemen and their dependents, and Vietnamese civilians. The organization tasked with the exploitation of South Vietnamese servicemen and their dependents was called Military Proselytizing (*Binh van*). The organ responsible for the exploitation of the civilian masses was called Civilian Proselytizing (*Dan van*). During the war with the French and later the Americans, Party planners created a more specialized category to include “foreign servicemen.” This organization was considered a “subset” of the extant Military Proselytizing and was called the Enemy Proselytizing Department (*Cuc Dich van*)(EPD).

The organizational model upon which the VCP intended to insure control of the militant and political “struggle” to liberate South Vietnam was called the “cadre system.” This cadre system was borrowed by the Vietnamese Communist Party from the Soviet and Chinese models. In order to institute this process, General Giap linked armed military struggle with political struggle, and as a result every PAVN military organ, down to and including company sized units, had both a commander and a political officer. This represented two types of cadre within the PAVN military hierarchy, sometimes referred to as “command cadre” and “political cadre.” While command cadre attended the normal military training courses, the political cadre were afforded only a brief exposure to military cross-training. At the upper echelon, political cadre from the Central Party Organ were joined with professional cadre of the armed services (police and military) in an organization similar in nature to the National Security Council of the U.S. called the “National Defense Council” (NDC), at times called the “Inter-Ministry”(Lien Bo). The constitution of the SRV provides that the President is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the nation, and at the same time serves as the Chairman of the NDC. Membership in the NDC includes representatives of the Ministry of National Defense, the Military Affairs Committee, and the External Affairs Committee of the VCP, the Ministry of Interior, the General Political Directorate of the PAVN, and the Science and Technology Commission. Since the majority of Council members are concurrently members of the ruling Politburo of the VCP, Party control of military (PAVN), police (MOI), and intelligence and security (National Intelligence Office and General Research Department) operations are assured.

With the decision to begin the war against the French, General Giap converted his guerrilla units into covert intelligence and propaganda teams. By building on the World War II era “Armed Propaganda Teams” (*Doi Tuyen truyen Vo trang*), of which Gen. Giap served as a Team Leader, the Vietnamese leadership could utilize trusted Party cadre in re-orienting those teams toward opposing foreign and domestic forces. These teams formed the basis for the later expansion of military intelligence, Enemy Proselytizing, and military security. Relying on the traditional “triangular concept,” the Peoples Army was reorganized with the three primary functions of Staff, Political, and Rear Services. The Political element established policy and managed strategy, the Staff element implemented the strategy, and the Rear Services element provided the logistics to support that implementation. Due to their perceived importance, the responsibility for intelligence, security, and proselytizing were retained

by the Political element. This reorganization created a system wherein the PAVN High Command was in reality subordinate to the General Political Directorate.

At the small unit level, battalion and smaller sized units were managed by "party subchapters" (*Chi Bo*) under the control of the political officers (*Chinh tri vien*), while regimental and larger sized units were managed by "party chapters" (*Dang Bo*) under the direction of political commissars (*Chinh uy*). By operating solely on the instructions issued by the Politburo, Party cadre instilled the will of the Party through coercion, assassination, intimidation, and political/diplomatic maneuvering. Although the military commanders, i.e., command cadre, were primarily responsible for tactical operations on the battlefield, all major decisions were ultimately approved by the political commissar. These military politicians were also responsible for writing detailed performance evaluations, and for assessing the reliability and suitability of all members occupying key positions, including the unit commanders.

In addition to monitoring the commanders, other important responsibilities of the political cadre included the temporary detention, medical treatment, and evacuation of POWs to higher authorities. Most importantly, Party cadre attached to PAVN or PLAF units were responsible for implementing the POW policy by properly training their soldiers in Party policies for captured U.S. personnel. In outlining the role of the Party in dealing with American prisoners, some of the following points were emphasized. "The battalion Party Committee and the Chapter Committee should consider the mission and capability of the unit before prescribing criteria ((for the capture of prisoners)). In meetings, Party Chapters must use their time ((to study)) to thoroughly understand the importance of soldiers and Party members in capturing and handling prisoners in order to provide appropriate leadership."⁷

While the Political officers were responsible for carrying out the Party policy for capturing Americans alive, the Enemy and Military Proselytizing cadre were responsible for POW affairs. Similar in organization to the National Defense Council, Military Proselytizing Councils were organized at Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), Region, Province, and below. The cadre attached to the various commands would inspect the different units or POW camps in their areas for compliance. The Enemy and Military Proselytizing cadre at the lower levels would write monthly, semi-annual, and annual reports, which were forwarded to higher echelons. In the more southern parts of South Vietnam and in Cambodia, these reports were sent via courier along the commo-liaison routes. Further north, the cadre could transmit using the telephone wire nets that extended down the Ho Chi Minh Trail into communist Military Region (MR) 5, (which encompassed the northern portion of South Vietnam), and the B-3 Front (i.e., western Central Highlands). There is little current evidence to indicate if the cadre of the third main proselytizing element, *Dan van*, designed to sway the civilian masses of the countryside, had any relationship to POWs, other than occasional radio broadcasts and news releases extolling communist victories against U.S. aggression. Also during the war years, other specialized *van* elements, such as intellectual proselytizing (*tri thuc van*), were created when the situation dictated.⁸

By 1954, the General Political Directorate began training groups comprised of 30 Military Proselytizing cadre members under the guidance of Soviet and Chinese advisors. When the Geneva Agreement on Indochina was signed and with the regroupment of communist forces from the South to the North, and refugees from the North to the South, much of the intelligence apparatus in southern Vietnam was also dispatched to the north. As replacements, the Lao Dong Party decided to dispatch 150 Military Proselytizing cadre to the areas of Saigon, Danang, and to the southern Headquarters of the Party located in western Tay Ninh Province near the border with Cambodia. Except for tactical military intelligence and reconnaissance, all intelligence and proselytizing operations were placed under the authority of the Bureau of Public Security. In October 1961, the controlling Southern Region Party Committee was reorganized as the Central Office for South Vietnam

(COSVN). With the establishment of COSVN, subversion and espionage operations were retained by the Military Proselytizing Section, which was initially placed under the authority of the COSVN Military Affairs Committee, a Party organization devoted to monitoring military matters.

In terms of VCP POW policy, after reviewing dozens of captured documents and interrogation reports, a consistent theme emerges of careful handling of not only American prisoners or their remains, but any documents or material possessions captured with them. Nothing was overlooked that could be used for Party policy, a policy that was driven by communist ideology to extract as much useful intelligence information from U.S. prisoners as possible. It was also important to create the seeds of a communist revolution in the prisoner's home country by "educating" the POWs in communist beliefs, and to generate propaganda statements designed to influence the anti-war movements in their home countries. A typical interrogation report emphasizes these communist motivations for actively managing this POW exploitation program. "There is a threefold purpose in taking U.S. prisoners: They can be exploited for intelligence purposes; they can be exploited for propaganda and counter-propaganda purposes through radio broadcasts and interviews published in the neutralist and pro-Communist press; they can be used politically to further the cause of communism beyond the limited confines of Vietnam by propagandizing them, brainwashing them, and converting them into communist or pro-Communist cadres who will work actively for the Party in their own country after they have been released."⁹

Prisoners, especially American prisoners, were considered a strategic asset to the North Vietnamese. Early instructions by the South Vietnam National Liberation Front (SVNLF) after the release of some captured Americans in December of 1963 stressed both the propaganda and document collection themes. "Take advantage of prisoners for international propaganda purposes. The prisoners must express good impressions about the Liberation Front...records of the deceased Americans were kept, and their remains were carefully maintained...You must understand the experiences and procedures for the release of prisoners in order to provide the necessary documents in the propaganda program."¹⁰

Other captured wartime documents and Sources provide evidence that as a part of their training, PAVN forces were often given instructions concerning the handling of American personnel captured or killed on the battlefield. According to those instructions "a detailed file was to be prepared on each POW as soon as he was brought to a detention camp. With regard to the deceased ones, records should be maintained, listing such information as deceased date and burial location. Personal belongings of the deceased should be carefully kept. Similar records were to be prepared for the U.S. POWs who escaped, were missing, became lost, or were killed by enemy bombing."¹¹

In summary, Military Proselytizing cadre were involved in subversion and fifth column activities, i.e., attempting to convince ARVN soldiers to desert or not to engage in aggressive patrolling, while the PAVN's Research Department (*Cuc Nghien Cuu*)(CNC) was responsible for strategic intelligence.¹² The Military Intelligence units attached to COSVN or Region level engaged in tactical reconnaissance for missions like sapper attacks, while the Public Security forces were responsible for counter-intelligence, assassinations, physical protection of COSVN, and other general police and judiciary work. The routine handling of foreign POWs was retained by the PAVN's Enemy Proselytizing Department, which in South Vietnam was placed under the authority of the Political Staff, SVNLA. Due to its' mission of handling American POWs, the EPD was considered the main "POW Section." Although the EPD was organized specifically for foreign prisoners, the mission of exploiting foreign deserters and collaborators was retained by the Military Proselytizing cadre. This is an important juncture in the history of the VCP proselytizing effort that will be discussed later in greater detail under the topic of Military Proselytizing.

Reality vs. Rhetoric

Despite this policy of careful documentation regarding American POWs, in analyzing any military organization, some caution needs to be addressed. The word "certain" has always been difficult to apply in dealing with communist cadre or organizations, and it is often impossible to say with absolute precision what documents the SRV still holds. The authors are not suggesting that PAVN/PLAF policies were always perfectly adhered to, or that documents pertaining to captured U.S. POW/MIAs may not have survived the journey to Hanoi, or were simply lost due to the ravages of war. Further, the POW policy was not always implemented and was often ignored. Indeed, numerous directives admonish subordinate units for not properly following POW policy, and many interrogation reports revealed that PAVN soldiers were unaware of POW policy. At times PLAF troops or North Vietnamese militia were either uninformed of Central Committee policies or failed to carry them out, especially in the early years of the war. While the PAVN/PLAF maintained a public policy of lenient treatment of POWs, the American POWs held in North Vietnamese jails experienced a considerable amount of torture and beatings. Policies were also ignored at times on the field of battle.

A historical account by the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) provides one clear example. Like soldiers in every war, policies were often ignored at times in the heat of battle. The Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) Command History for 1967 notes one particular gruesome example of PAVN or PLAF atrocities against captured American soldiers. Marine Lieutenant William M. Grammar and Army Sergeant Orville B. Frits were captured early in the morning of May 20, 1967. When American forces had recaptured the area, the bodies of Lt. Grammar and Sgt. Frits were found in the courtyard of a church, horribly mutilated.¹³ There are many other Intelligence reports that discuss the killing of American prisoners.

However, Party cadre worked hard to educate their soldiers and civilians to capture Americans alive, and to collect all their documentation. Military Proselytizing sections often set up special classes to correct this situation. "Combat units were constantly reminded to capture POWs, especially Americans. They are instructed to issue ropes to each soldier for binding POWs, to teach the troops English phrases such as "Hands up," and to teach such techniques as removing the shoes of U.S. POWs to hinder their escape attempts."¹⁴ Other proselytizing sections were urged to emphasize care of the POW, "for to do otherwise harms the revolution, decreases the chance for prisoner exchanges, and limits the international propaganda impact."¹⁵

Regardless of the circumstances of individual cases, there is absolutely no question regarding communist policy, a policy developed in the war with the French. That policy revolved around two principal strategies. Live prisoners were used for political concessions, and remains or information were used for economic concessions.

The French Experience

PAVN/PLAF policy on foreign POWs dated back to the war against the French. Foreign prisoners and remains were considered a key part of the VCP's near and long term negotiating strategies. An extensive Rand Corporation analysis of the French experience in coping with the POW/MIA issue provides a dramatic illustration of Vietnam's coldly calculated intent. "Despite the substantial political and economic concession the French have made to Hanoi since 1954, France has never received a full accounting for its missing and dead. The Vietnamese communist government has consistently circumvented and violated the terms of the 1954 agreement concerning the accounting for France's missing servicemen. Hanoi's actions clearly demonstrate that its only interest in the French military graves in Vietnam and the requests for remains by the families of the deceased is in the economic and political benefits that the Vietnamese Government can derive from control of these

remains. We should keep this in mind in dealing with Hanoi. We can anticipate that Hanoi's objective is to obtain increasingly large economic and political concessions in exchange for piecemeal releases of remains and information about our missing servicemen."¹⁶

When queried by the U.S. government on French/Vietnam postwar POW negotiations, the French government provided sobering answers to the U.S. Although the French and U.S. situations were different, the "French believe that the U.S. may encounter some of the same basic problems from the Vietnamese: broad political "payment" to establish a program and then steep financial concessions for each body at each step of the way."¹⁷ Further, "the PAVN has remained the DRV representative for these matters. No deserters or ralliers have been repatriated. No remains of prisoners of war who died in captivity have been repatriated. Quai officials commented that the operation appeared to be run to provide revenue for the DRV. The French found they had to pay fairly stiff commercial prices for each body. They thought the U.S. would have to do the same."¹⁸

According to estimates, the French were required to pay 55 million francs (approximately 10 million US dollars) to the VCP each year from 1954 until 1986, when France received some 24,000 remains in a four month period. The cadre tasked to work with the French Government Task Force were later reassigned to work with the American Joint Task Force-Full Accounting. Looking at the 32 year period of doling out remains piecemeal to the French Task Force, MIA family members and veterans were skeptical of USCINCPAC/JTF-FA claims of a so-called "open window of opportunity" during which rapid progress was expected in return for similar payments by the U.S. Navy Regional Contracting Office to the bank account of the External Affairs Section of the VCP Central Committee in the Vietnam Commercial (VietCom) Bank in Hanoi.

The Ministry of Public Security

To accomplish this strategy of economic concessions for remains and live prisoners for political concessions, the VCP invested POW responsibility with several ministries. Generally, the most well known Vietnamese organizations which played a role in handling American POWs are the Ministry of National Defense (MND) and the Ministry of Public Security (*Bo Cong An*) (MPS), now known as the Ministry of Interior (*Bo Noi Vu*)(MOI).

There is some controversy concerning the relationship of the public security apparatus to the overall process of exploiting American personnel. It is our understanding that DPMO believes that the MPS played only a secondary role in handling U.S. POWs. However, a CIA study from 1975 based upon captured wartime enemy personnel who possessed detailed knowledge of the Vietnamese POW procedures, stated that the MPS was deeply involved. The report concluded that "The MPS is similar in organization and mission to the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB). The MPS is the executive arm of the communist party (*Dang Lao Dong*-Workers Party) of the DRV. It is responsible for the overall security of the party, internal security within the DRV, and for foreign intelligence operations, and has the overall responsibility for the administration and detention of POWs."¹⁹

Generally, the MPS ran the prisons. It had two main offices in Vietnam, with Office "A" in Hanoi and Office "B" collocated with the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) in the south. The southern office of the MPS also maintained detention facilities in the outskirts of Hanoi at Thanh Tri. This prison, which detained U.S. POWs captured in South Vietnam who were later moved to the north, was designated "Hanoi B." Detention facilities of the MPS Office "A" in northern Vietnam were staffed by personnel of Prisons Department C-51 in Hanoi, while those in southern Vietnam fell under the authority of Prisons Department C-53, located in the Lo Go area of northwestern Tay Ninh Province. Some remains of U.S. POWs held in C-53

were repatriated after the war ended, but other prisoners executed there on orders of the party have never been returned. Live-sighting reports on American prisoners held in the C-53 prison continued to be received by the U.S. Government until late 1974, but were never acted upon due to procrastination and the sudden collapse of the Saigon Government. Public security prisons were considered more brutal than PAVN installations.

However, the MPS also interrogated prisoners for its own requirements. In the north, intelligence interrogations of American POWs were conducted by Interrogation Department C-44 in Hanoi. In the south, interrogations were conducted by Public Security cadre attached to the various Party Regions and provinces throughout southern Vietnam, or by cadre assigned to the Security Section of COSVN. In selecting cadre for duty with the security services, the Party was again at the forefront. "The Party should be regarded as the sole body that provides absolute and direct leadership. Whenever possible, security sections at various echelons were to be staffed by Chapter Party Committee members exclusively, and individual Party Chapters were to as "steering" nucleuses in the various security and intelligence communities."²⁰

Within the DRV, the MPS forwarded its' interrogation reports through Party channels to the MND and the Office of the Prime Minister for coordination throughout the remainder of the DRV government.²¹ Coordination with the Office of the Prime Minister is considered noteworthy, since the Vietnamese Office for Seeking Missing Personnel (VNOSMP), established after the war to work with American POW/MIA specialists, also reports to the Office of the Prime Minister. The Office of the Prime Minister also managed part of the wartime propaganda effort through the Vietnam News Agency (VNA) and the Radio Diffusion Board. Radio Hanoi, like the Vietnam News Agency (VNA), while under the nominal control of the Central Party Propaganda and Training Department (now called *Cuc Tuyen Huan*), was attached to the Office of the Prime Minister. Many of these radio broadcasts and newspaper articles, plus the "discovery" of VNA photographs of deceased American personnel, have helped the U.S. Government form a category from dozens of MIA cases called "Special Remains" cases. These are cases where photographs, films, or newspaper articles clearly show the deceased American to be in custody of the North Vietnamese, but his remains have never been returned.

When considering the relationship between the Office of the Prime Minister and the long term implications of Vietnam's propaganda efforts, it should come as no surprise that such media were under the control of the Prime Minister's office. These propaganda broadcasts were considered very important, and long after the war the Vietnamese continue to use the Vietnam News Agency to issue subtle statements. As the U.S. began to conduct the first joint field investigations in Vietnam during 1988, the Vietnamese continued to send signals to the U.S. concerning the POW/MIA issue through the Radio Diffusion Board. The following broadcast by Radio Hanoi was monitored. "At a press conference on 4 July held in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Center, Comrade Sukaret (Translator's note: spelled phonetically) the head of the public prosecutor's office raised the issue of Soviet soldiers who were captured as POWs in Afghanistan. He rejected the fabricated themes of a number of reactionary circles that apparently some repressive cases are being prepared in regards to the Soviet POWs captured in Afghanistan in case they return home. He emphasized that the military personnel who belong to the element of Soviet voluntary forces engaged in the fighting in Afghanistan who were captured as POWs and returned to the Fatherland from abroad will entirely enjoy the rights of political society and other rights of every Soviet citizen as specified in the Soviet constitution. Stemming from the lofty humanitarian viewpoint of socialism, the Soviet State is prepared to be lenient to all those Soviet POWs whose actions, because they were unable to withstand enemy torture, have caused damage to the interests of the Soviet State. Comrade Sukaret stated that approximately 312 Soviet military personnel have been captured in the Afghanistan conflict. A number of them were sacrificed while searching for a way to escape from the prison camps of the Afghan counter-revolutionaries. Currently there are approximately 200 people being held in Afghanistan, a few tens of people in America, and a small number in Canada and western Europe. He hoped that the administrations of the countries involved in

this issue, especially America and Pakistan, would create conditions for the Soviet POWs to soon return and reunite with their families."²²

In addition to military prisoners, Public Security camps also processed civilian Vietnamese and American prisoners. A document of the Binh Dinh Province Security Committee pertaining to captured Vietnamese personnel stated, "Camps for POWs and defecting soldiers should only be used to confine personnel from military or semi-military units. GVN cadres such as Inter-family Chiefs, Hamlet Chiefs, administrative personnel, "plainclothesmen," reconnaissance unit personnel and civilians should be placed under the control of Security Sections."²³ Other documents of the Binh Dinh Province Party Committee captured during the war indicate that personnel transferred from regular detention camps to security agencies were scheduled for "further investigation."

American civilians who performed other than normal military duties were also included in the security system. These personnel were considered as "spies," and subjected to very thorough interrogations. Even American female volunteer workers, like the school teachers and medical specialists captured in Hue during the 1968 "Tet" offensive, were suspected of being "spies." Although they were able to convince their captors that they were genuine volunteers, they were required to sign statements to be broadcast over Radio Hanoi, and then were released back to American control. The radio broadcasts were made from Hanoi only days after the statements were recorded near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

In other cases, those prisoners who were not successful in explaining their backgrounds either disappeared, died in captivity due to brutal interrogations, or were executed after capture. Chief Warrant Officer Solomon Godwin, from Hot Springs, Arkansas, also captured in Hue, died while undergoing a lengthy period of interrogation by the Public Security Police. Due to his assignment as an Intelligence Advisor to the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) National Police Special Branch in Hue, both CWO Godwin and captured CIA agent Eugene Weaver were held in a highly secret camp far removed from other American prisoners. Mr. Weaver survived the ordeal, and more recently the Vietnamese admitted to U.S. officials that not only did the Soviet KGB have direct access to Mr. Weaver for interrogation in Vietnam, the KGB also attempted to recruit him for intelligence operations in the United States. Although an American eyewitness account provides proof that CWO Godwin was in the custody of communist forces at a fixed location, neither he nor his remains have been returned.

The Ministry of National Defense

As mentioned, while the MPS shared responsibilities for the administration of U.S. prisoners with the MND, the military had the primary evacuation and handling system for American POWs. The military system began at the capturing unit on the battlefield and extended to the MPS run Hoa Lo Prison in Hanoi. Almost all of the captured Americans who lived to return home went through this system. Although this system was managed by PAVN military forces, nevertheless such operations, like other military operations, were controlled by the Party.

Three components of the Ministry of National Defense (MND) function as the Ministry's intelligence, proselytizing, and security arms. These elements include the Research Department (*Cuc Nghien Cui*)(CNC), which collected military intelligence and was organized similar to the Soviet "GRU," the Enemy Proselytizing Department (*Cuc Dich Van*)(EPD), and the Military Security Department (*Phong 50*). Although the Military Security Department office probably coordinated closely with the General Department for Security (*Tong cuc An ninh*) of the MPS, little is known of its activities with U.S. POWs.

The Research Department (CNC) played an important role and maintained several separate offices tasked with the exploitation of American POWs, the Research Office (*Phong 70*), the Reconnaissance Office (*Phong 71*), the Technical Reconnaissance Office (*Phong 72*), and the Foreign Countries Intelligence Office (*Phong 76*). The CNC provided strategic intelligence to both the PAVN High Command and the most senior levels of the North Vietnamese government. The southern arm of the CNC attached to COSVN was designated B-22.

While little is known of the full extent of CNC exploitation of American POWs, their documents and/or equipment, due to the amount of tactical and technical knowledge possessed by American POWs, the principal mission of the CNC element probably was the extraction of military information to be shared with the various PAVN Commands. The CNC analyzed documents, such as maps and flight manuals, captured from downed American pilots. "Interrogations emphasize collection of tactical information, particularly regarding the target objective of captured pilots. Research Office 70 conducts general interrogations, while Office 71 is concerned with specific targeting information."²⁴

The Enemy Proselytizing Department (EPD) was the senior PAVN authority for routine POW management and, "had the primary responsibility for the indoctrination of American POW's."²⁵ The EPD was a military organization that had been in place for over 20 years. EPD cadre reported through the Political Staff Sections of the various echelons up through the military chain of command to the General Political Directorate of the PAVN high command in Hanoi. In July 1965, the EPD sent its first group of cadre south. About 50 were assigned to COSVN, while approximately 20 were dispatched to MR-5. It is believed that both the Research and Enemy Proselytizing Departments maintained master lists of all captured U.S. POWs. While the EPD assisted the CNC to interrogate American POWs for collection of specific intelligence requirements, the EPD was more concerned with overall knowledgeability for making recommendations for further interrogation by the intelligence services, for possible recruitment by the Military Proselytizing Department, or for battlefield propaganda efforts with the use of loudspeakers and leaflets.

The main component of the EPD responsible for American POWs was called the Policy Office. In South Vietnam and Cambodia, the EPD had forward commands that were attached to the Headquarters, SVNLAf, and below. One cadre, who was the Deputy Chief of the SVNLAf EPD Policy Office, "reviewed interrogation reports to assess the knowledgeability and attitudes of the US POWs. Source was required to submit evaluation reports to the Political Department in order to form the basis for recommendations for early release or exchange of US POWs considered progressive. Source recalled...all (POW) exchanges were directed by the Politburo in Hanoi."²⁶

Even though the EPD was PAVN's primary POW organization, it still coordinated closely with other elements. In North Vietnam, the EPD arranged with the MPS regarding the placement of U.S. POWs in MPS-run facilities, helped screen and evaluate prisoners, and made recommendations concerning the further evacuation and future potential of captured personnel. Both the Military Proselytizing and the Enemy Proselytizing Departments maintained offices, designated C-12 and C-14, located near the "Citadel" POW Camp in Hanoi.

In South Vietnam, these two proselytizing elements coordinated closely. A directive issued by COSVN head and Politburo member Pham Hung in 1969, and forwarded to units of the South Vietnam Liberation Armed Forces (SVNLAf), stressed the need and importance for cooperation between the Military and Enemy Proselytizing elements. "Close liaison with the Military Proselytizing Section was to be conducted to obtain an understanding of the psychological development within the enemy ranks so that an effective propaganda campaign could be carried out to intensify further the anti-war movement and decrease

the enemy's combat effectiveness."²⁷ The directive went further and stated that "American POWs constituted valuable capital assets and were an effective weapon in the field of the VC political and diplomatic struggle."

Another document underlining the coordination between the Military Proselytizing and the EPD elements was issued by the Enemy Proselytizing Section, Political Department of the SVNLAf is titled "Public Presentation of U.S. Prisoners of War." "To make a rational use of POW's during their detention [period], the Political Department of Mien [Zone] (i.e. southern Vietnam, aka B-2) had, for the first time and in coordination with the Military Proselytizing Section of the Region (i.e. Party Committee Region, *Khu uy*), organized meetings during which U.S. POW's were publicly presented to the masses with a view to propagandizing our military victories and motivating the masses' hatred of the Americans and readiness to fight any American move in the Western Zone [of South Vietnam's Delta]."²⁸ Concerning the relationship between the Military Proselytizing and EPD elements, the same document states "the only other COSVN-level organization which was in contact with the EPD detention facilities was the COSVN Military Proselytizing Section (*Ban Binh van*). The PDV (*Phong dich van*) sent information copies of all its indoctrination and interrogation reports to the Military Proselytizing Section via the SVNLAf Political Staff."²⁹

The Unexplored Military Proselytizing System

The general purpose of Military Proselytizing (*Binh van*) was to destroy the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), or at least reduce its efficiency, through a spectrum of politically motivated acts. "A military proselytizing mission is a motivational mission aimed at soldiers in the enemy army to make them clearly understand the purpose of the revolution and the rights of the people. The military proselytizing mission is very important as it aims at demoralizing and disorganizing the enemy troops in order to strengthen our own and it is also one of the "three prongs" to defeat the US imperialists and liberate SVN."³⁰

This was the main thrust of General Giap's "disintegrating the enemy" process. The *Binh van* element was oriented toward Vietnamese servicemen and their dependents, and American deserters and collaborators, rather than the general American POW population. This element sought not only to persuade soldiers to cross over to the communist side themselves, but to elicit their assistance in luring other servicemen to cross over as well. Due to the degree of importance placed by the communists on the motivation of personnel taken into custody, and their potential value toward propaganda efforts, any individual who voluntarily crossed over to the communist side would be considered a "deserter," and would, therefore, be under the control of the *Binh van* rather than the EPD element. This policy was apparently consistent without regard to the rank or position of the individual, and was based entirely on perceived motivation.

It is crucial to differentiate between the themes of *Binh van*, which sought to play upon emotions like hatred, fear, longing for home, etc., in order to weaken and ultimately neutralize the opposing forces, versus the role of the *Binh van* cadre. Central Party Political cadre assigned to Military Proselytizing duties held no government positions, but were simply called Party Cadre (*Can bo Dang*). Usually, such cadre were graduates of the Communist Party Ideological School designed to train party cadre for critical positions. This elite course was called the "*Nguyen Ai Quoc*" school (*Truong Nguyen Ai Quoc*), i.e., Nguyen the Patriot, a pseudonym used at one point by Ho Chi Minh. Although the principal location for this school was in Hanoi, some cadre reassigned to *Binh van* duties during the war were also trained at a southern branch of the school located inside Laos and adjacent to Kontum Province, Vietnam.³¹

One responsibility of the *Binh van* element was penetration and recruitment from the POW population to further the manipulation of public opinion in France and America, which played a key role in advancing the strategy of the Party far into

the future. The possibility exists that some charismatic *Binh van* cadre were tasked with gaining the sympathy of selected foreign POWs believed to have the potential for influencing public opinion after being released. "Long range strategic operations were designed to induce individuals to serve the communist cause upon return to their units and their homelands."³² The Military Proselytizing cadre's guidebook referred to earlier, which in addition to essays by American antiwar critics, contains the following instructions. "Special treatment was to be granted to U.S. PW's having special social standing, such as those who were the sons or relatives of American celebrities or high ranking officials in the U.S. Government. Intense propaganda and motivation should be imposed on these PW's."³³

Because of the sensitive nature and agitation-propaganda aspect of operations designed to lure both Vietnamese and American personnel to desert and collaborate, the *Binh van* function of each Military Proselytizing Council was closely controlled by the Current Affairs Committee of the party at each echelon. A wartime interrogation report of a captured *Binh van* cadre from Quang Ngai Province reported that his section was one of 19 sections reporting to the Party Current Affairs Committee, and that within his section were seven subsections, one of which was an Enemy Proselytizing subsection.³⁴ The power and authority of the Current Affairs Committee, as well as the requirement for coordination with the intelligence and security services for exploitation of selected American prisoners, is clearly illustrated in the following captured document used to pass instructions from the Current Affairs Committee of Song Be (formerly Phuoc Long) Province to POW Camp T-52 where U.S. Army SP4 James H. McClean was held during 1966. "Nguyen Thiet (Vietnamese prisoner) village 3, Duc Bon, Phuoc Binh District-kill in secret and afterwards put his body in a bomb crater. After, if his family wants to know where he is, we will show them. Hang him, do not shoot him because his family will know the round in his body. We will tell his family we put him in prison for three years, but his death was by bombs. Duong Thuc (Vietnamese prisoner) village 2, Duc Bon, Phuoc Binh district-kill here, do not move to his area. American soldier-need to send his documents to Security Area Office to check again."³⁵

Psychological Operations programs of the *Binh van* would have been coordinated through the Propaganda and Training Department of the COSVN Military Affairs Committee. The MACV Command History for 1973 states that "The Military Proselytizing activities of the Party apparatus were directed by the Propaganda and Training Department (*Cuc Tuyen Huan*) of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party. Military proselytizing activities were directed by the military proselytizing sections found at all levels of the infrastructure...At provincial level military proselytizing activities were directed by the military proselytizing sections of the Party committee and by the military proselytizing sections of the military units."³⁶ The Propaganda and Training Department of the Central Committee was represented within the government structure by the Ministry of Propaganda, which was later redesigned as the "Ministry of Culture and Information," and finally at one point "The Ministry of Culture Information and Sports." The need for "information" to be used in "arousing the voluntary will of the people and teaching them" was recognized by the Central Committee in 1965 when it issued an instruction for the formation of a new state organ, "a directorate general for information and an information system at various levels."³⁷

Subversion and espionage operations of the *Binh van* were coordinated with the COSVN security branch. According to a document of the Central Security Department (*Khoi Bo Noi Trung Uong*) classified Secret, "There are the following sections: specialized espionage, political security, Party security protection, discipline protection and security, judiciary in VC detention camps, techniques and science, signal and liaison, and propaganda and training."³⁸ POWs who were performing normal military duties were placed in the custody of the Enemy Proselytizing Element and evacuated to a camp of the Military region. Subsequently, they were sent to Hanoi, except those south of MR-5, since they were too far south to make the trek to Hanoi. However, personnel who were involved in intelligence work or who "crossed over" were turned over to the Military Proselytizing elements for evacuation to a camp operated by Security Service personnel. Copies of all relevant reports from

these POWs would have been forwarded by classified courier to Hanoi through Party/Security channels, and not the military system.

Penetration and fifth column operations of the *Binh van* were also coordinated with the EPD element, as the EPD probably served as a spotting agency for the recruitment of potential collaborators from the overall prisoner population. The CMIC source mentioned earlier states that even though he was in charge of the *Binh van* section, he was not privy to the operations of the Penetration sub-section, as this person reported directly to the Current Affairs Committee.³⁹

These *Binh van* penetration agents, (often recruited from POW populations), and operations were extremely skillful. An example of how these operations were conducted was revealed by one source, who "has provided information of the penetration of Popular Force (PF) Out Posts (OP). The source, a former Deputy Chief of the Military Proselytizing section of VC Can Tho Province, stated that as of late DEC 70, over 10 OPs in VC Can Tho Province had been penetrated, and an additional fifty agents were being trained. First the prospective penetrant must enlist in the PF and attend basic training. While at the PF Training Center he is contacted by a female com-mo-liaison cadre, posing as his wife or sister, who relays instructions and receives information. Instead of going home for his week's leave upon completion of basic training, the agent is taken to a location in which he receives detailed instructions about how to set up an OP for a successful VC attack. He then reports to his place of duty and begins reporting on the situation. When the OP is determined to be vulnerable to atk, the agent is provided with the instructions about what he is to do during and after the atk. Usually this involves the agent's "escape" and subsequent return with a story of his "heroism" and narrow escape from the en. The agent is then usually assigned to another OP and the process begins again."⁴⁰

This delineation between PAVN and Party control highlights what we believe is a previously ignored divergence in communist POW policy. The different reporting channels for Enemy and Military Proselytizing, EPD through PAVN, and Military Proselytizing through Party, are crucial. For instance, one Oral History interview states, "When asked concerning the Military Proselytizing office, source said he was not familiar with the organization because it's activities and camp system were completely under the direct control of the Communist party and completely separated from the Enemy Proselytizing office during the war."⁴¹

To further refine this point, we believe that while at the lower echelons the various Military and Enemy Proselytizing cadre were primarily engaged in tactical operations, it was at the Front and COSVN level that the true differentiation occurred. While the authors recognize that in the MR-5 and B-3 Front area the Military and Enemy Proselytizing sections were combined, this was the only Region to have such an organization. This arrangement was probably due to the geographical distance from both COSVN and the Party Central Committee in Hanoi. However, the communists developed another proselytizing section for the large concentrations of American forces in the area of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), a specialized sub-element designated *My van* (American proselytizing).

Some of the Vietnam specialists who work for the DPMO have maintained that Enemy and Military Proselytizing are not separate entities. The DPMO's senior archivist in Hanoi has stated this position during the Senate Select Committee hearings.⁴² Some of the confusion may be attributed to captured documents linking either the elements of *Binh van* and *Dich van*, or *Dan* and *Dich van*, which began to occasionally appear in captured communist documents or interrogation reports in the late 1960's and '70's.⁴³ These documents generally discuss the plans and themes of proselytizing, and not the organizational separation. Further, Enemy Proselytizing was occasionally mis-translated as Troop or Military Proselytizing, which helped to badly confuse the two among intelligence analysts. However, captured documents from early in the war show

that the Communist Party did give some responsibility for American POWs to the Military Proselytizing section. "The Z Current Affairs Committee has entrusted the administration and indoctrination of the American and RVN officer POW's to the responsibility of the Z Military Proselytizing Section."⁴⁴

Further Oral History interviews conducted in 1992 support our position. When questioned concerning the differences between Military and Enemy Proselytizing, knowledgeable communist cadre summed up the situation by stating that the difference between the *Binh van* and *Dich van* elements was very similar to the difference between the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency of the United States.⁴⁵ Another Oral History interview indicates that "Enemy Proselytizing is a subset of Military Proselytizing."⁴⁶ Additional Oral History interviews confirm that while the EPD element was under the military control of either the headquarters of the South Vietnam Liberation Armed Forces (SVNLAF), code named "*Mien*" (i.e. "Region") in southern Vietnam, or the General Political Directorate of PAVN in Hanoi, the *Binh van* element was under the direct control of either the southern arm of the Politburo in the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) in South Vietnam, code named "R," or the actual Politburo in Hanoi.⁴⁷

After the war in Vietnam ended in 1975, the *Binh van* element was reorganized as the propaganda element of a restructured "Enemy Proselytizing and Special Propaganda Department" (*Cuc Dich van va Tuyen Truyen Dac Biet*). This further signifies the propaganda duties of *Binh van*, which also had the responsibility of coordinating through the Party in arranging prisoner exchanges, obtaining approval for scheduled executions, and as mentioned, handling deserters/collaborators.

The Enemy Proselytizing Department did not have this authority. While the EPD handled most American military and civilian prisoners, the one category it did not have jurisdiction over was deserters. They were handled by Military Proselytizing elements. For instance, an interrogation report from a former member of the EPD element in southern Vietnam comments, "The Enemy Proselytizing Office of the South Vietnamese Liberation Army (SVNLAF) Political Staff has the primary responsibility for the administration, indoctrination and interrogation of foreign military and civilian prisoners as well as for Army of Vietnam (ARVN) captured personnel. *It had no jurisdiction over captured VC deserters, captured Vietnamese civilians, or U.S./Allied/ARVN deserters who voluntarily rally directly to VC organizations*" (author emphasis added).⁴⁸

Much of the evidence thus far assembled indicates that the Military Proselytizing cadre were more interested in propaganda at the national level in order to sway the opinions of the family members of POWs, as well as the American people as a whole. To accomplish this task, the Military Proselytizing section had tape recorders available at the MR-5 camp, and wartime broadcasts were transmitted from Hanoi as well as Cuba. On the other hand, the EPD normally included a subsection called the "Combat Propaganda" (*Tuyen Truyen Vo Trang*) Section responsible for hand-held, bullhorn type broadcasts to American units.

This group included both McKinley Nolan and Robert Garwood. However, there is some confusion as to which proselytizing element had control of Garwood. Documents from the war include letters Garwood wrote to fellow collaborator Gustav Mehrer, which indicate Garwood was under the control of Military Proselytizing elements.⁴⁹ Other CIA reports also indicate Garwood engaged in activities such as megaphone broadcasts to U.S. troops inciting them to desert. However, an Oral History with a communist EPD cadre claims that Garwood was under the control of the EPD element.⁵⁰ According to cadre formerly assigned to the area, due to the unique nature of Military Region, aka Inter-Region 5, the Military Proselytizing and EPD elements were co-located. Therefore, due to his English and Vietnamese language capability, it is possible that Garwood worked with both elements.

Therefore, if the Military Proselytizing cadre reported directly to the Propaganda and Training Department through Party and not military channels, and they were responsible for collaborators like Bobby Garwood and McKinley Nolan, the key question becomes, how many other collaborators remained under their control at war's end?⁵¹ There are many interrogation reports in the "Uncorrelated Files" that discuss suspected American collaborators. If the Vietnamese propaganda experts had induced a number of Americans to collaborate, the security aspects of that program would go well beyond any paper protocols requiring "full accountability."

For example, in reading the book by escaped American Special Forces officer Nick Rowe of his time in captivity, the psychological pressures put on him to cooperate and generate propaganda statements were tremendous. Considering the enormous amount of willpower and discipline exercised by Rowe to resist his captors, some less fortunate individual might have cracked under the physical and mental strain. The cases of Humberto Acosta-Rosario and Walter Cichon bear deeper investigation, since the Vietnamese now claim they don't know what happened to them, although they were definitely captured.⁵²

There have been other cases where Americans were either known or have been suspected to be remaining in Vietnam and this was denied by the Vietnamese. When the former head of the Congressional POW/MIA Task Force, Rep Sonny Montgomery, visited Vietnam in 1976 he asked then Prime Minister Pham Van Dong concerning the presence of any Americans in Vietnam at that time. Assured by PM Dong that there were no Americans remaining, Rep Montgomery delivered that report to the White House and the American people. In reality, at the time of his conversation with the Prime Minister, both Garwood and Mr. Arlo Gay were being held not far from where Rep Montgomery attended his meeting.

During a subsequent meeting in 1991 attended by Senator John Kerry (D, Mass), Vice-Foreign Minister Le Mai and one of the authors, the question was posed to Mr. Le Mai, "Why did Prime Minister Dong fail to reveal the presence of Robert Garwood and Arlo Gay to Rep Montgomery?" Mr. Le Mai explained that Robert Garwood had requested that the SRV Government not reveal his presence to American officials and in that case the Vietnamese were simply honoring his request. In the case of Arlo Gay, however, his stated background was "not clear" and as a result he was suspected of being a "spy." Since Robert Garwood did in fact elect to remain in Vietnam, and Arlo Gay was a contract employee of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) captured during the final days of the war, Mr. Le Mai's answer seemed to track with these previously unknown VCP policy aspects.

Such distinctions may also have been considered as a point of law, since anyone who crossed over would normally be considered as a *Hang binh*, or deserter, and not subject to the law of land warfare. According to Vietnam's law on Vietnamese nationality, "Foreign citizens and apatrid (sic) persons residing in Vietnam, abiding of their own free will by the Vietnamese Constitution and law, are eligible to Vietnamese naturalization if they fulfill the following conditions: to be eighteen years old or more; knowing the Vietnamese language; having resided in Vietnam at least five years. In special cases, foreign citizens are eligible to Vietnamese nationality without being asked to fulfil (sic) the above mentioned conditions: have made contributions to the cause of protecting and defending the Vietnamese homeland."⁵³

Some U.S. servicemen were released early to fulfill propaganda requirements, either to exhibit the "humanitarian" policies of the communists, or because the Vietnamese believed that the serviceman had changed and now displayed a "proper attitude." It was hoped that these POWs would contribute to the anti-war movement. However, before being eligible for release, the POW's background was checked. A wartime report of a meeting of the PLAF MR 3 Current Affairs Committee alleges that the "VC have carefully checked the background data and families of all POWs prior to their release. The personnel data of

each prisoner is screened by the both the VC and the U.S. Communist Party. Some of the U.S. prisoners already released have joined movements and demonstrations for peace and complete withdrawal in Southeast Asia."⁵⁴ We note that Nick Rowe was discovered to have falsified his background to his captors through such rendered assistance. This discovery almost lead to his execution.

In educating the populace at large in the basic fundamentals of proselytizing, Party cadre compared efforts to gain the cooperation of POWs to "raising pigeons." According to another cadre handbook, "We release POWs like raising pigeons to be released, later they will bring the flock back to our house."⁵⁵ Another interrogation report compiled in 1969 indicated that "Before 1968, North Vietnamese military and civilian personnel were hostile to U.S. military personnel and often killed those who were captured. In 1969, however, the North Vietnamese Government issued an order stipulating that captured U.S. military and civilian personnel be kept alive for anticipated exchange and compensation. Moreover, it was specified that special attention should be paid to captured Americans who had made specific achievements, or came from wealthy families."⁵⁶

The other main *Binh van* theme was to persuade American military personnel in Vietnam to ask the U.S. Government to send them home, persuade the American military not to fight the PLAF and that the latter were fighting a just cause, and influencing the U.S. Government not to support the Army of the Republic of Vietnam nor to condone the killing of innocent civilians in "liberated" areas. This strategy was conceived of as early as February 1963. A captured Military Proselytizing document "emphasizes that US POW's must be properly handled, well fed, and made to write letters praising the lenient policy of the Front towards US POW's, for international propaganda purposes, and to encourage their fellow countrymen to go back to the USA and stop committing crimes against the Vietnamese people. If possible their picture must be taken, and declarations recorded prior to their release. Personnel belongings must be kept intact. In regard to US POW's who die, they must be well buried, their name and POB, date of death recorded, and personal property secured to send back to their families. Concerning important US POW, they must be kept as hostages for eventual exchanges of POW."⁵⁷

The *Binh van* cadre accomplished this mission by various means. Upon being captured, each American POW was required to complete a standard questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect information that would be used for the overall goals and mission of "promoting the antiwar movement and urging US and satellite troops to refuse to take part in operations and to demand prompt return home."⁵⁸ The *Binh van* cadre were interested in personal information from POWs concerning relatives, including their mailing address in the United States. Such information was obtained in an attempt to gain the support of the individual POW, his family and friends, and the American public. By using statements made by POWs, by "brainwashing" POWs to return home and spread propaganda, the *Binh van* element attempted to spread dissent and anti-war sentiment throughout the United States.

This anti-war propaganda developed by the Military Proselytizing cadre was considered crucial to the communist war effort. Subsequent to his defection, former PAVN Sr. Col. Bui Tin, the editor of the Army newspaper *Nhan Dan*, underscored the importance of the overall proselytizing effort in demoralizing the American war effort: "It was essential to our strategy. Support for the war from our rear was completely secure while the American rear was vulnerable. Every day our leadership would listen to the world news over the radio at 9 a.m. to follow the growth of the American anti-war movement. Visits to Hanoi by people like Jane Fonda and former Attorney General Ramsey Clark and ministers gave us confidence that we should hold on in the face of battlefield reverses. We were elated when Jane Fonda, wearing a red dress, said she was ashamed of American actions in the war and that she would struggle along with us."⁵⁹

This propaganda was also used against American soldiers in Vietnam. An interrogation report of an Enemy Proselytizing cadre stated "Photographs of peace movements had been sent to COSVN by the peace organizations in the US and these were used in the leaflets (NFI) and sometimes produced by the Source himself."⁶⁰ The collection of personnel effects of American soldiers was necessary for use in this propaganda campaign. One captured document "informs addresses that Anti-Vietnam war movement was spreading in the United States, and there exists a requirement to furnish this movement with personnel belongings of US servicemen. When above mentioned items are captured, they should be transferred to the Hai Hung Province Current Affairs Committee for report and transfer to higher headquarters by Hai Hung Military Proselytizing section."⁶¹ Other documents state that "In the event corpses of US KIA are recovered from a battleground, they should be secretly buried after removing all personnel effects. Their graves should be marked for future recognition."⁶² Another captured document issued in 1970 by the Standing Committee of the southern arm of the Politburo called for all units to continue efforts aimed at capturing American personnel effects. They were instructed to hide the bodies of Americans killed-in-action (KIA), and to collect all personal documents for forwarding to Hanoi.⁶³

Such documents were needed in order to develop propaganda broadcasts oriented toward POW/MIA family members in the United States. One such broadcast came in November 1967 when Hanoi announced the death of USMC Lance Corporal James O. Pyle. Actually Pyle was alive and well, but his field pack with letters containing the address of his parents in America was captured by PAVN forces during an attack. Thus Pyle's personal documents, which were lost in the area of Danang, found their way to Hanoi for propaganda purposes.⁶⁴

In Laos, the PAVN-advised Lao *Binh van* efforts were similar to those conducted by the communists in South Vietnam. Since approximately 85 per cent of the MIA cases in Laos involving U.S. personnel have incident locations in areas that were under the wartime control of Vietnamese forces, many POW/MIA analysts believe that the Vietnamese could also rapidly solve many of the Lao cases. This is not to say that the Lao themselves do not possess records pertaining to American POWs. An example of Lao record-keeping is shown by the acquisition of a document pertaining to Cpt. Walter H. Moon from Rudy, Arkansas. This document was obtained from refugee sources in Thailand, and was titled "Biography of a Prisoner." It was obtained from a collection of similar documents from the Lao Military High Command Headquarters in Vientiane during the early 1980's. Although Cpt. Moon was executed while being held prisoner in a fixed camp, his remains have not been returned. Lao Military Security personnel observed in the same office where the document was obtained have been identified as having been involved with U.S. POWs during the war, and having participated in meetings with U.S. officials and MIA family members arriving in Laos to discuss the POW/MIA issue. Moreover, recent SIGINT information indicates that in June 1977 the Lao moved to secretly recover the remains of the Americans killed at Site 85.⁶⁵ Additionally, a CIA cable indicates that the most senior levels of the Lao government maintained a "central and highly classified record of American pilots captured by Lao and Vietnamese forces during the war in Laos."⁶⁶ Later DIA cables cited a source that said the Vietnamese removed those records because of Lao looting of crash sites.⁶⁷

In southern Laos along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, captured Americans were moved to the nearest PAVN military station (*Binh Tram*) and transferred to the control of Logistics Group (*Doan*) 559. A CIA report describes the organization of this important group: "In support of increasing requirements for PAVN involvement in Laos, the Lao Dong Party established in 1959 a central control authority over all PAVN activities in Laos. Designated after the date of its establishment, Group (*Doan*)/Office 959 was under dual command of the Central Committee's Central Western Affairs Department (*Ban Cong Tac Mien Tay Trung Uong*) Military Staff and the Ministry of National Defense. Until 1968, Office 959 was responsible for control of all PAVN units in Laos. In 1968, control over PAVN combat units and advisory personnel to the LPLA was reorganized. Office 959 relinquished its control over PAVN units in the north to the PAVN Northwest Military Region, and

its control over PAVN units in central and south Laos to PAVN Military Region 4 group 68, which later became known as Group/Division 968. Office 959 and its subordinate advisory groups became solely responsible for advisory assistance to the LPLA, although it continued to coordinate its activities with the PAVN Northwest Region and with PAVN military Region Group 68. This organizational system for PAVN operations in Laos remained intact through at least 1975."⁶⁸

Several North Vietnamese advisory units were deployed by Vietnam to Laos during the war. At differing times, PAVN advisory groups operating in Laos included Groups 6, 95, 100, 363, and 763. The Lao High Command Political Staff's Military Security Section (*Suan Sua Ka Suc*)(i.e., *Binh van* element) had approximately 200 personnel engaged in recruitment and penetration operations against enemy forces. Coordination for inter-party liaison between Vietnam and Laos was the responsibility of International Liaison Group 101. That the Vietnamese were closely involved with U.S. POWs in Laos during the war is borne out by the fact that they have now repatriated the remains of at least three Americans lost in Laos, including two from deep inside Lao territory. Moreover, personal effects of some Americans lost in Laos have been "discovered" in the Archives of the Central Military Museum in Hanoi.

Office 22, Group 875, Military Justice Department

One of the most important post-war reports on Hanoi's policies has been that of an individual known as "The Mortician." An ethnic Chinese, he left Vietnam in 1979 as part of the purge of Vietnamese with Chinese heritage. His duties included the recovery of both French and American remains, and their subsequent storage and warehousing in Hanoi. He worked for an organization known as Office 22, Group 875, of the Military Justice Department of the PAVN High Command. Vietnam was embarrassed by reports of "warehousing and storage" provided by "The Mortician," who testified before a concerned U.S. Congress. The Mortician described in great detail a plan for exploiting the issue of U.S. remains initiated by the VCP in 1963.

According to the mortician, sometime during 1969, he was transferred from his normal duties involving the processing and storage of French remains to work with the remains of Americans. He said that as of 1964, the remains of U.S. servicemen were already being preserved and stored in Hanoi. When he testified before Congress, the Mortician at first estimated he had personally prepared some 452 remains of Americans. He later revised his estimate to indicate that he had personally prepared some "290 sets" of remains, and he had observed approximately 400 "boxes" said to contain U.S. remains in a Hanoi warehouse. The Mortician was administered a polygraph examination with no deception indicated. The Government of Vietnam denounced the testimony of the mortician as being a fabrication. The denial continued until 1991 when visiting delegations to Hanoi were told that "we did at one time warehouse remains but now we have returned them and we don't do this anymore." After Pentagon analysts announced their opinion that the Mortician was judged to be a reliable Source, apparently Hanoi strategists accepted the fact that his testimony was unshakable. Although at that point Vietnam had unilaterally returned over 400 remains, thus approximating the total number of "boxes" observed by the Mortician, only about 69% of the remains returned and identified as Americans bore scientific evidence of processing and storage.

Further reinforcing the belief that Hanoi was only partially cooperating, another Source, who was a defector during the war arrested shortly after the collapse of the Republic of Vietnam Government, related his detailed account of having observed some 600 U.S. remains in Bat Bat Prison west of Hanoi. This Source described shelves containing U.S. remains packaged in clear plastic bags, along with several "flight suits" of U.S. pilots stored in the same building. Forensic scientists of the Central Identification Laboratory-Hawaii (CILHI) later detected pieces of plastic similar to that described by this Source adhered to several remains repatriated unilaterally by Vietnam. During a visit to the Bat Bat Prison of the PAVN Military Police and Criminal Investigation Department in 1992, one of the authors was able to confirm that the handwritten sketch provided by the

Source of this report matched, almost identically, the actual configuration of the prison. However, the actual storage building mentioned by the Source had been completely cleaned and renovated with no visible signs of human remains.

The defecting Mortician also related another intriguing story concerning the presence of three Americans remaining in Vietnam as late as 1979. According to the Mortician, these three men elected to remain in Vietnam to assist the PAVN. The Mortician recalled having seen the three Caucasians at the facility of Office 22, Group 875 where records on U.S. casualties were maintained. During a subsequent meeting with Mr. Robert Garwood, the mortician identified him as being one of the three individuals he observed. The Mortician heard that the other two men were also Americans who were living outside Hanoi. Some government analysts have expressed the opinion that the two unidentified men are, or were, Russian or other Eastern bloc country technicians. However, if the Vietnamese are truly being "absolutely superb" in their level of cooperation, surely they could have at least notified U.S. officials concerning the identities of these two men and should have been willing to arrange an interview by U.S. investigators.

The officer in charge of Group 875 was interviewed in April 1993. This organization was responsible for the burial, preservation, and repatriation of the remains of 23 Americans who died in the prison system. PAVN Colonel Doan Hanh related that while the Enemy Proselytizing Department had no responsibility for recovering American remains, he was sure they were aware of Office 22's activities. Furthermore, "the Central Office of the Communist Party directed the efforts to recover U.S. remains."⁶⁹

The role of Group 875 remains somewhat of a mystery. The authors believe that Group 875 served as a Task Force designed to link the various ministries involved in the overall POW/MIA issue. This Task Force provided the administrative and logistical support required to recover American remains in Hanoi and the surrounding areas. Most likely this was done in anticipation of U.S. demands during the final stages of the Paris Peace Talks. MPS documents turned over in 1995 indicate that MPS officials queried Public Security cadre in various provinces regarding the location and number of American remains in their provinces.

Another document described the relationship between the Military Justice Department (MJD, now reorganized in the General Political Directorate as the "Military Police and Criminal Investigation Department") and the MPS. "Between 1964 and March 1973, the MJD worked jointly with the Ministry of Public Security (now known as the Ministry of Interior) in guarding U.S. prisoners of war (POW's) in the northern SRV. During this period, the MJD was tasked with providing physical protection for U.S. POW detention facilities, such as the Son Tay facility. It had no jurisdiction over the central Hoa Lo Prison in Hanoi, which was guarded by, and under the administration of, the Ministry of Public Security. Although the MJD provided external guard forces for other U.S. POW detention facilities, the internal administration of these facilities was under the Ministry of Public Security, which maintained U.S. POW records and directed the interrogation of U.S. POW's."⁷⁰

Office KG-5 of the MPS also performed forensic science duties in the processing of the remains of Americans who died in captivity. KG-5 personnel were included in Vietnamese delegations that visited the JCRC and the CILHI in Hawaii. KG-5 personnel normally examined U.S. remains at the Forensics Laboratory located in the Da Phuc area northwest of Hanoi, or the Criminal Science Institute located at 66A Yet Kieu Street in Hanoi. To accommodate the processing of remains of Americans who died in the south, KG-5 established an additional section in Office "B" of the MPS located in southern Vietnam designated KG-5B. In processing skeletal remains for repatriation to the United States, Office KG-5 coordinated with hospitals like Military Hospital 108 (*Quan y Vien* 108) in Hanoi. The bodies of the 23 American POWs who died in captivity in North Vietnam were taken to Hospital 108, prior to being repatriated to the U.S. Detailed "death certificates" describing

the causes of death of each man who died in captivity were prepared by Military Hospital 108, and these documents accompanied the repatriated remains of the 23 men.

According to the CILHI, the combined efforts of the MPS and MND resulted in a very efficient system for recovering and storing U.S. remains and personal effects. A 1991 memo of the laboratory indicated "CILHI had prepared a bar chart displaying the number of identified remains received during official repatriations from the SRV since March 1973, with contrasting bars showing the number of remains exhibiting some evidence of storage. The chart and supporting statistics were as of 31 January 1991. The total number of identified remains was 260; the total number showing evidence of storage was 158."⁷¹ This study proved, beyond a shadow of doubt, that Hanoi continued to withhold a significant number of U.S. remains.

PAVN's ADWOC System for Air Defense

One aspect of the Vietnamese systems for handling American POWs that is different from the organizations discussed previously are PAVN's Air Defense units. The Vietnamese maintained a massive Air Defense force designed to protect the homeland and monitor intrusions into its airspace. This system was designed and equipped by the Soviets. The true heart of the Air Defense system was the Command and Control (C&C) system known as the Air Defense and Warning Operation Center (ADWOC.) Air Defense Headquarters was located at Bach Mai Airfield in Hanoi.

According to a former NSA analyst responsible during the war for PAVN Air Defense forces, American POWs came under ADWOC control as a result of both heat of the battle results, and preplanned and deployed "flak traps" to capture specific pilots.⁷² Most pilots captured in the heat of the battle by Air Defense units were quickly passed on to higher echelon political authorities.

However, "flak traps" were ADWOC ordered AAA deployments designed to shoot down and recover both specific pilots or their aircraft. NSA intercepts seen by the analyst indicated that the men captured in these ADWOC directed missions were provided "special handling," i.e. sent to the Soviet Union.

Additionally, after Tet '68, the PAVN 367th Air Division began to retain some POWs for forced labor to construct underground logistics facilities in Laos. The majority of these men probably died in captivity and have never been accounted for. A recent book by a former soldier involved with MACV-SOG during the war states this his team stumbled onto an air vent protruding from the side of a mountain in Laos. His men claimed that they could clearly hear American voices emanating from the air vent.⁷³ It is unclear whether DPMO has taken these claims seriously.

Other Vietnamese offices and intelligence debates

The Intelligence and Public Security Services also played other roles in matters involving American prisoners. In addition to monitoring foreign diplomatic communications in Hanoi, the Technical Reconnaissance Office, KG-3, of the Ministry of Public Security was responsible for the censorship of all letter mail and parcels sent to or from U.S. POWs. KG-3 also planted audio and video surveillance devices in both detention cells and interrogation rooms occupied by U.S. personnel, and monitored POW "tap" codes in use during the war.⁷⁴

The amount of MPS bugging of POW cells has never been revealed. Indeed, surreptitious filming also took place. One of the authors spoke to a journalist working on postwar film projects in Hanoi who was provided motion picture footage of U.S.

POWs, which was obviously filmed without the knowledge of the subjects. One author was also allowed to view approximately 20 minutes of this same film, showing a well-known American POW, now serving as an elected official, in his cell and outside in the Hoa Lo courtyard. After the war ended in 1975, Office KG-3 established a new office in South Vietnam located in the former CIA communications room on the top floor of the former American Embassy. This office was designated KG-3B. During the fall of 1992, Office KG-3 also installed the telephones and fax system for Detachment 2, JTF-FA at the "Ranch" compound in Hanoi. This telephone and fax system was primarily used by U.S. government officials to discuss strategy in dealing with the Vietnamese on the POW/MIA issue.

Two areas of great debate has been how much information, including parts from downed American planes or their pilots, the North Vietnamese shared with the USSR, the PRC, and other communist countries. A CIA report from Saigon just prior to the withdrawal of American forces states, "Starting with the 1960 visit to NVN of a deputy chief of the KGB and the initiation of professional training for MPS cadres in the Soviet Union sponsored by the KGB, the MPS maintained a close but controlled liaison with Soviet KGB officials in Hanoi. Conversely, although the Chinese Communist advisors to the MPS were withdrawn in 1958, the MPS continued to maintain liaison with the Communist Chinese Ministry of Public Security officials attached to their Hanoi embassy to exchange information. (Field Comment: Although the Source does not claim the MPS also maintained a field relationship with KGB or Chinese MPS officials in other countries, he has identified MPS officials under North Vietnamese Embassy cover in Laos and Cambodia with known and frequent contact with Soviet and Chinese Embassy officials in those countries.) The Soviet KGB, with its wide range of activity against the United States, has provided political and military information to the MPS. In exchange the MPS and the North Vietnamese Army have furnished the KGB information on US pilots imprisoned in North Vietnam and on other US military and civilian prisoners in North Vietnamese hands. In addition, the KGB worked with the MPS in establishing the original interrogation requirements for all US prisoners and, although neither the KGB nor the Chinese Ministry of Public Security was allowed direct access to any US prisoner (*sic*), the MPS accepted specific intelligence requirements from the Soviets and Chinese which it used in prisoner interrogations. (Source Comment: The primary Chinese concern was with the capabilities of US aircraft. MPS officials speculated that the Chinese intended to use technical interrogation and examination of US aircraft to supplement Chinese Communist aircraft design)."75

There is additional information available indicating that the intelligence shared by the MPS with the USSR and the PRC was considered valuable to the extent that it created competition between the two countries. "In spite of the obvious great importance for both sides of this collaboration, our military-scientific specialists in the DRV continue to operate under difficult circumstances, which are often artificially complicated by our Vietnamese comrades. It is known that trips to the sites of downed aircraft is the Soviet specialists' main method of collecting pieces of equipment. This system is set up by the Vietnamese side. The Vietnamese, however, hide the aircraft crash sites from us using various pretexts. They delay our trips, even after giving us permission to go to the crash site. It is for this reason that the main source of information regarding aircraft crash sites comes from the observation of Soviet specialists. There have been many times when downed aircraft were examined by qualified specialists before the arrival of our specialists. That has now been cleared up; it turned out to be Chinese."76

The other great debate has raged over whether American POWs were categorized according to their perceived intelligence and propaganda value. Many interrogation reports mention that American POWs were categorized, mainly into different groups labeled "progressive" or "stubborn." The CIA report remarks that "prisoners were listed as, "A," special due to the important information they possessed, "B," those who had the same intelligence value as "A" but who were uncooperative, and "C," those whose continued presence in the DRV, after thorough debriefing, offered little or no advantages to the DRV.

No attempt was made to contact relatives in the U.S. of certain categories for the following reasons: Prisoners in categories "A" and "B" were not exploited for the purposes of collecting information through their contacts in the U.S. or by attempting these contacts to engage in anti-war activities. This was not done because it might have led to the surfacing of their identities. The identity of category "A" prisoners were carefully guarded because identifying them as POWs rather than as missing or killed-in-action would permit the U.S. to employ countermeasures to negate the value of the information they provided. Similarly, the identity of the category "B" prisoners was kept secret because they may not have survived the interrogations or other techniques used to make them cooperate."⁷⁷

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

After the fall of Saigon, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) became the lead Vietnamese government agency involved in the POW/MIA issue. The MFA participated in the post-war search of the remains of Americans, and coordinated with the MND and MOI to find American grave sites. The MFA's main strategy in the 1980's "was to wear down U.S. resolve and elicit from Washington increasingly significant concessions in return for minor POW/MIA cooperation." This was "the result of a long-standing Vietnamese Foreign Ministry strategy intent on offering minimum concessions to the U.S. and prolonging negotiations over basic principles of humanitarian cooperation and technical approaches to uncovering information."⁷⁸

Apparently the MFA was fulfilling its duties due to the "consular affairs" relationship with the various diplomatic missions in Hanoi. However, with the removal of Nguyen Co Thach as Foreign Minister in mid-1991, the lead role of the MFA in the issue was curtailed, although many aspects of the MFA involvement had been closely controlled by the External Affairs Section of the Party Executive Committee headed by Mr. Hong Ha.

For instance, some defecting Sources have indicated that officials working in the MFA who are assigned duties associated with the issue of U.S. POW/MIA have been "sheep dipped." As was the case with the French Task Force during the first Indochina War, the assignment of experienced Vietnamese Political cadre from the General Political Directorate (GPD) to Vietnam's Foreign Ministry to manage POWs and subsequently to participate in negotiations with American diplomats, has also occurred. In the past such GPD Political Cadre included Senior Colonels Tran Quang Co and Ha Van Lau, both of whom later became legitimate diplomats with the rank of Ambassador and Vice-Foreign Minister.⁷⁹

In order to provide effective management of the American accounting efforts, the VCP similarly detached Political cadre such as "Ambassadors" Tran Hoan, Nguyen Can, Cu Dinh Ba, and Nguyen Xuan Phong from the GPD to the Foreign Ministry during the 1980's and 90's. Although ostensibly collocated in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the "Vietnamese Office for Seeking Missing Personnel" (VNOSMP), the efforts of these officials have actually been coordinated by a small office located on Nguyen Gia Thieu Street in Hanoi, near the residence of former Foreign Minister and Politburo member Mr. Nguyen Co Thach. Also playing an important role in the transition from party to government control of the issue is the head of the External Affairs Section of the National Assembly, Mr. Hoang Bich Son, aka Ho Liem.

U.S. Intelligence studies of Hanoi's Knowledge

After reviewing all available information gathered since the inception of the JCRC/JTF-FA archival and investigative process begun in 1987, DOD/DPMO claims that "we now judge that we can no longer automatically assume that previous archival correlations indicate additional information can be produced today."⁸⁰ However, prior to this latest survey, the Defense Intelligence Agency produced several detailed reports outlining the U.S. government's expectations for cooperation on the

part of the Vietnamese in unilaterally turning over both remains and records. These studies incorporated information obtained from defectors involved with processing or storage of remains, scientific analysis of remains, wartime interrogations and captured document translations. They built on an even earlier detailed survey undertaken by the Joint Casualty Resolution Center (JCRC) which indicated that 1485 remains could be recovered and repatriated by the Vietnamese without the deployment of U.S. field teams in Indochina.⁸¹

Produced by DIA's Special Office for Prisoner of War and Missing in Action, the forerunner of the DPMO, one lengthy report was devastating in its critique of the Vietnamese ability to account for missing Americans. "We will also suggest that Vietnam's political aims have in fact influenced the selection of remains that have been repatriated...the inevitable conclusion reached...is that not only can Vietnam account for many more Americans than it has chosen to admit, but also that the SRV has recovered many more sets of American remains than it has repatriated."⁸²

This study went on further to clearly articulate that "Vietnam's motivations for withholding cooperation are complex but rest principally on the belief that both the information and the remains they have cached represent valuable commodities that if carefully and thriftily managed can be translated over the long-term into leverage and influence with the U.S. and perhaps even into monetary gain. Vietnam, relying perhaps on historical insights, is apparently calculating that it can wait the U.S. out and in the meantime will cooperate only on a minimal and piecemeal basis. What Vietnam treats as an issue of prudent resource management, however, is for the U.S. a moral and humanitarian matter...We must resolve ourselves to the fact that achieving the fullest possible accounting for our missing men will require a long-term commitment in which perseverance and a firm negotiating stance will play a key role."⁸³

This opinion did not change as more information became available to the U.S. intelligence community. According to a key point of another DIA briefing presented to the Vietnamese in May 1992, "Finally, our forensics experts tell us that approximately 70 per cent of U.S. remains returned by your government show evidence of long-term storage. By this we mean they exhibited minimal bone mass loss, commingling with other remains of individuals lost in widely disparate areas, and coating with preservatives and/or disinfectants. Thus, while your government has returned many sets of remains that exhibit evidence of storage, the information available to us leads us to the conclusion that there are still American remains that are readily available or easily retrievable and that could be repatriated to the U.S. in a very short period of time." Concerning the ability of Vietnam to provide records, the briefing indicated that, "Based on information acquired through original documents, wartime and refugee interviews, and other sources, we have learned that PAVN developed a specialized cadre and a dedicated organization to handle foreign prisoners and casualties during the first Indochina War. That cadre and organization, which appear to have continued to operate into the early 1960's, was adapted to deal with U.S. Forces when they were introduced into Indochina."⁸⁴

When faced with the DIA's consistent position, Vietnam's Propaganda Department moved to counter the briefing by raising the issue of "grave robbers," and "remains traders." This was not altogether unexpected by skilled U.S. negotiators with long-time experience in dealing with Asian Communists. However, some officials responsible for the issue sought to gain sympathy for Vietnam's position with key White House officials by minimizing the conclusions of these studies. The in-depth studies were countered by a memo from the President's Special Emissary for POW/MIA Affairs in Vietnam, who stated, "It appears to me that the difficulties of terrain, the effects of high-G impacts on the human body, the effects of climate on the remains, the errors in location of remote area graves and associated difficulties of finding them several years later, and the questionable efficiency of a reporting system under wartime attack might push the probabilities in the various steps well below that which the DIA has implicitly assumed. Further, I don't believe we have any real handle on the extent civilian scavenging of crash

sites and battlefields has disrupted the government's attempts to collect remains. Simply put, there are a lot of unknowns in Vietnam. Getting remains into "the warehouse" was not so easy as the bearer of the DIA briefing may infer."⁸⁵

The Postwar Proselytizing Effort

As further evidence of Vietnamese long-term management plans regarding the issue of American POW/MIAs, after the Vessey trip in 1987, wartime *Binh van* cadre were transferred to duties placing them in positions ensuring continued contact with American targets with potential for exploitation regarding political and economic concessions, such as removing the trade embargo and improved U.S./Vietnam relations.

Concerning the strategic role of both the Civilian and Military Proselytizing elements of the SRV, we have witnessed various stages: insurgency, conventional war effort, liberation, consolidation, and finally economic development of the country. A detailed government study illustrates the basic principle applied by the communists in the beginning stage. "The VC have long understood the axiom of insurgent warfare; that an insurgency cannot succeed without the active support of a small part of the population of the target country, and the passive support of a larger share of the population of the target country."⁸⁶

Although not yet confirmed as being entirely accurate, a review of the name lists of cadre involved with American POWs during the war against the name lists of cadre who were assigned to work with Americans after the war is revealing. For example, an MR-5 female *Binh van* cadre, Ms. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Suong was head of the Quang Ngai Military Proselytizing "Penetration" subsection in charge of covert agents. Ms. Suong was involved in several cases where American personnel were lured to capture by English speaking female agents during the war. The current listing indicates that a Ms. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Suong has been assigned as the Vice-chairman of the Vietnam Petroleum Organization dealing with representatives of American oil companies. Recently there has been much controversy concerning Vietnam's decision to build a major oil refinery in a remote area of Quang Ngai Province.

MR-5 *Binh van* cadre Nguyen Chinh was transferred to become the Deputy Director of the Religious Affairs Department in Hanoi dealing with U.S. officials concerned with human rights. Senior cadre Ho Nghinh, aka Ho Huu Phuoc, a brother of Mr. Hoang Bich Son, served as the Party Secretary of Quang Nam-Danang during the war and Chairman of the Military Management Committee for Danang when the war ended. He has now been assigned to the Committee for Economic Development. During the war years U.S. intelligence reports indicated that Mr. Ho Nghinh was in charge of an English language training program for female agents involved in luring Americans to capture. Mr. Nguyen Van Hung, who studied English at the Vietnamese-American Association in Hoi An, where Garwood was captured, later became the interpreter in the POW camp where Mr. Garwood was held for several years. After an extended tour in the former Soviet Union, Mr. Hung returned to Danang to teach in the Foreign Language Institute under the tutelage of Professor Ho An, who served as the National Liberation Front Representative and Indoctrination expert in Mr. Garwood's camp. Former interrogator of U.S. POWs in South Vietnam, Mr. Nguyen Hung Tri, was reassigned as the Director of the Export Department, Vietnam National Petroleum Import-Export Corporation. Former interrogator Dang Thuan Hoa was reassigned to the Ho Chi Minh City Commercial Affairs Office.

In an attempt to proselytize the leadership of U.S. veterans organizations, former Deputy Minister of Defense, Political Commissar of Military Region 4 (DMZ), and former head of the Enemy Proselytizing Department, LTG Tran Van Quang, was reassigned as head of the National Veterans Organization of Vietnam. He has been tasked to work with U.S. organizations, such as the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). A "Veterans to Veterans" approach was initiated by the

VVA, in which the leadership of this veterans group asked its membership for any records or memorabilia relating to Vietnamese MIAs. In turn, the Vietnamese veterans might be more forthcoming on American MIA information that their veterans might "possess." Many Vietnamese cadre hope to cash in on the expected travel boom by acting as guides to former battle sites. Doing so requires a higher level of services than most Vietnamese villages can now provide. However, after several JTF-FA trips to particular Vietnamese villages for crash site inspections, one often notices new construction of guest houses for the impending tourist traffic. These "Guest houses" are often managed by former communist security cadre. The amount of money spent in Vietnam on visits by the VVA leadership and its members, compared to the minimal results achieved in MIA accounting, indicates that the Vietnamese may be guiding the American veterans organizations into the same 32 year old rut in the accounting road left by the French.

It can hardly be termed a "coincidence" that LTC Nguyen Van Be, who interrogated Mr. Garwood and several other U.S. POWs during the war has now been reassigned as manager of the My Khe Hotel at China Beach. Ironically, the Commander of Joint Task Force-Full Accounting, as well as the Commander of the JTF-FA Detachment in Hanoi have visited the My Khe Hotel for "in-country" rest and recuperation on several occasions. Apparently they have made no attempt to contact the "manager" concerning his knowledge of missing Americans. The former Camp Commander of the Loc Son Camp, where Mr. Garwood and several other American POWs were processed en route to the Military Region 5 camp, Mr. Vo Kim Ho, aka Chin Ho, has now been assigned as the director of the Danang Tourism Company. Former GPD Security Cadre and head of the Quang Nam-Danang POW/MIA task Team, Mr. Mai Quy Trung, has now been assigned as the Director of the Asia Tourism Company. All three of these cadre have been involved in arranging trips for the Veterans Initiative of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). Former Political Officer of the V-211 Hospital in Laos, where several wounded U.S. POWs were treated during the war, Dr. Le Cao Dai, has now been reassigned as head of the "10-80 Committee" to supervise research on Agent Orange. Although some American personnel, including those on the so-called "discrepancy case list" died at V-211 Hospital and were buried in the local cemetery, Veterans Initiative Team personnel of the VVA have worked with Dr. Dai and his colleagues for several years without ever discussing with them the issue of the American servicemen present at the wartime V-211 Hospital.

The post-war reassignment of proselytizing cadre experienced in U.S. POW handling to political, economic, human rights, and veterans affairs organizations involved with the United States indicates that the Vietnam Communist Party intends to continue its long established process of "gaining the active support of a small part of the population" by exploiting U.S. officials, business groups, and veterans organizations. The extent to which this has already occurred, to the detriment of MIA accounting, can only be determined by careful scrutiny of the official and unofficial contacts by representatives of the governments and private organizations from both sides during recent years.

Conclusions

It is increasingly obvious that regardless of the amount of hard intelligence and scientific evidence concerning Vietnam's duplicity made available to Washington and Hawaii, the White House has been repeatedly counseled to move forward in the normalization process, under the guise that Vietnam is not only cooperating for the present, but for unexplained reasons are expected to be even more forthcoming in the near term. To lay the ground work for explaining this phenomenon, the Defense Department has begun subtly indicating that "we have previously been operating under false assumptions." The recent Zero-based Review is an example of this new thinking. Because the government suddenly possesses so much more "detailed information" than in 1992, the conclusions from the accumulated experience and information gathered from over twenty years of examining Vietnamese POW policies and systems have now been discarded. Despite this new attitude, however, not all the

actions of the governments in Southeast Asia can be easily written off. "The Lao Government has steadfastly refused requests to review their wartime archives or to interview military veterans and political officials. Consequently, we only interview local villagers, most of whom were not in the loss areas during the war."⁸⁷

As an example of the political advice the President receives, President Clinton's so-called "point-man" on the POW/MIA issue, Veteran's Administration Deputy Secretary Hershel Gober, himself a Vietnam veteran and native Arkansan, travelled to Vietnam to observe digging operations west of Danang during 1994. After returning to the U.S., Deputy Secretary Gober began calling for more movement in the normalization process. In September 1994, a delegation from the Arkansas Governor's Task Force on POW/MIA coordinated a "fact finding" trip to Vietnam with Deputy Secretary Gober. After a four day visit to JTF-FA and the Vietnamese Office for Seeking Missing Personnel (VNOSMP) in Vietnam, the delegation included the following in their trip report: "The United States needs to expedite the normalization process with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam at the earliest possible moment. The strategic benefits to be gained by an alliance with this country to offset the influence of Communist China should be paramount in the long range goals of the United States. The Defense Department is apparently hamstrung in its efforts to completely resolve the MIA issue because of the standards imposed upon them for resolution of the identity of remains. We therefore strongly recommend that the President ask the United States Congress to enact legislation to establish a final, definitive, category, with the approval of the next of kin of the missing Americans, to reach conclusions based on reasonable standards without having to depend upon identification techniques not yet technically feasible."⁸⁸ In the report, the delegation thanked several organizations for making the trip possible, including the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission, the Maybelline Company, Remington Arms, and Delta Airlines.

Mention by the Arkansas delegation of the situation wherein the members came away with the conclusion that the Defense Department was "hamstrung in its efforts to completely resolve the MIA issue," and that the President should recommend Congress enact legislation to establish a final conclusion without having to depend upon "identification techniques not yet technically feasible," indicates far more profound political insight than could normally be expected of a delegation of state-level officials from Arkansas. A review of events leading up to the departure of the delegation, however, may shed some light on this particular aspect. One month before the delegation left Arkansas, the Military Command in Hawaii held a round-table discussion dedicated to approaching this same delicate issue. According to the results of the meeting, "The purpose of this message is to encourage submission of cases through established AFIRB procedures where insufficient biological remains exist to establish identity of the remains. USACILHI is currently preparing cases for submission that will rely on acceptance of non-biological evidence to establish the identity of the remains."⁸⁹

Although this new, progressive attitude for finalizing cases has been well received by major American corporations seeking to do business in Vietnam, most MIA family member and veterans organizations have expressed dismay at the U.S. Government's contention that the number of compelling discrepancy cases has been reduced to "only 50." They are quick to point out that the government figure of 50 does not include the more than 100 discrepancy cases in Laos or the Ho Chi Minh Trail area where the American serviceman involved was last known to be alive at the time of his disappearance. What this means is, that of the original 305 discrepancy cases, 196 occurred inside Vietnam, and at present only 50 of those 196 are unresolved. This would seem to indicate that 146 cases have been solved by the JTF-FA. In reality, however, only 26 of these 146 cases have been resolved with identifiable remains of the missing men. The other 146 cases have been resolved based entirely on circumstantial evidence. Thus one can easily see why the VCP is interested in gaining the cooperation of the "Veterans Initiative," obviously in the hope that untrained veterans, interested primarily in healing their own psychological challenges, will unwittingly serve to increase the weight given to such "circumstantial" evidence. Ironically, although

circumstantial evidence is considered adequate to determine that an American serviceman is dead, it is not considered sufficient to conclude that a man is still alive.

Circumstantial evidence gained by young, inexperienced infantry officers of the JTF-FA or by Veterans Initiative personnel touring Vietnam may not be enough to convince stalwart family members of the missing men. Concerning the verbal testimony indicating that the men are dead obtained from so-called "witnesses" prepared in advance and introduced by the Government of Vietnam, one only has to look at the local phone book to find numbers for the "Speaking Company," the "Acting Company," the "Mobile Propaganda Company," the "Tradition Office," or the "War Crimes Vestiges Office" of the Information and Culture Ministry.

Several elected officials of the U.S. government have also called for normalization with Vietnam, including Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts and Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa. Sen. Kerry has remarked publicly on Vietnam's "superb" cooperation, and he has been seen by many as championing Vietnam's attempts to lift the economic embargo and diplomatic sanctions. While Chairman of the Select Committee, he conducted several trips to Vietnam. One such trip was in April 1992. Senator Kerry visited a prison camp where Vietnamese officials informed him that not only were there no Americans being held in the camp, no Americans had ever been detained there during the war. Satisfied with this statement, Senator Kerry returned to the U.S. and praised the Government of Vietnam for its openness and superb cooperation. This set the precedent for key personnel of the JTF-FA to follow the Senator's lead in praising Vietnam.

Eight months later, however, an American prisoner was released by the Vietnamese. During his debriefing, the man said he was held in the same prison visited by Senator Kerry at the time of his visit. The man said he was moved from the prison to another detention site one day prior to the Senator's arrival, and then moved back two days after the Senator departed. One is left to wonder that if the Vietnamese are this duplicitous with one of their biggest supporters, what can the U.S. government expect.

Sen. Harkin visited Vietnam on July 4th, 1995, in which he also praised their cooperation in solving the POW/MIA issue. Upon returning to the U.S., Sen. Harkin personally briefed President Clinton and encouraged him to move forward in the normalization process, to include access by American businesses in Vietnam to the Overseas Private Investment Corp. Insurance (OPIC). However, MIA family members were alarmed to discover that his wife is President and CEO of this organization. This organization is designed to "bail out" American investors from potential failures due to Vietnamese government renegeing on business contracts and financial investments. What the MIA family members find hard to understand is, if elected officials such as Sen. Harkin as well as the American business community do not trust the Vietnamese with their investments, how can the family members be expected to trust the Vietnamese with an honest accounting for their loved ones. They are reminded of the opinion of respected CBS news correspondent Dan Rather who visited Hanoi shortly before President Clinton lifted the Trade Embargo on February 3rd, 1994. Upon his return, Rather described in an article for the Washington Review how angry he was, after being told point blank by a Vietnamese official in Hanoi, that Vietnamese policymakers were certain President Clinton would soon lift the Trade Embargo "because Americans will do anything for money." This revealing comment by Rather, who is considered to have a liberal view of U.S. relations with Vietnam, served to underscore to the MIA families the perception that the POW/MIA issue was being overwhelmed by the Clinton Administration's desires to open trade and diplomatic links with Vietnam at the expense of their missing loved ones.

Further deepening the families dismay, after the Senate Select Committee adjourned, some of the key personnel assigned to the Committee quickly seized high salaried positions within the U.S./Vietnam Trade Council, a business group designed to

facilitate normalization and trade between the U.S. and Vietnam. Activists have also criticized the President's former Emissary for POW/MIA Affairs in Vietnam, General John Vessey (Ret.). Gen. Vessey has been described as a "low key member" of the Board of Directors of a major U.S. airline granted lucrative U.S. Government contracts to fly refugees from Vietnam to the U.S. via the Orderly Departure Program (ODP), and which is currently seeking more routine flight routes between the two countries. MIA family members were stunned to learn that the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the U.S. Vietnam Trade Council is Ambassador William H. Sullivan, who served as Ambassador in Laos during the time that many of their loved ones became missing.

According to a biographical sketch on the President of the U.S./Vietnam Trade Council, this business development organization has developed close ties with the leadership of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). As a result, the VFW's senior leaders, much to the alarm of its membership, has declared itself in favor of normalization with Hanoi, and has further stirred controversy among its' members by presenting its' "Armed Forces Award" to Major General Thomas Needham, the first Commander of the JTF-FA, and "Legislator of the Year" to Senator John McCain, a former POW. Both individuals have been severely criticized by the POW/MIA family community, Needham for ordering the shredding of thousands of POW/MIA documents at the JTF-FA office in Bangkok, Thailand, and McCain for his inexplicable demeanor during the Select Committee hearing when he routinely attacked witnesses who suggested that the government's efforts in this issue had been less than exemplary. The current Vice President of the U.S. Trade Council is Ms. Francis Zwenig, who served as Chief of Staff for the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA. Ms. Zwenig had also served as Legislative Assistant to Sen. John Kerry.

As the relationship between the U.S./Vietnam Trade Council and the VFW developed, some activists claimed that the National Commander-in-Chief of the respected veteran's organization was "selling out" the POW/MIAs in return for the promise of a high-salaried position within the Clinton Administration. At the VFW National Convention in Phoenix, AZ during August 1995, the leadership of the VFW characterized such claims as "rumors and innuendo" not worthy of comment. Later in October of that same year, the Veterans Administration sent out a notice to veterans organizations stating "We are pleased to announce that Mr. Allen "Gunner" Kent recently joined our staff and will be assisting us in our liaison work with you and your colleagues in the respective veterans service organizations."⁹⁰ This revelation, along with the VFW's support for the President on moving forward in the normalization process with Vietnam prior to a full accounting caused a serious drop in the VFW's membership renewals for 1996, most notably among Vietnam era veterans. So much for rumor and innuendo.

Although the U.S. Government claims that Vietnam is doing everything it can to account for the 2,200 American personnel still unaccounted-for in Indochina, this contention is not supported by the facts. In reviewing this information, a picture emerges of a complex system heavily influenced by Vietnam Communist Party policies and goals and strictly controlled by trusted Party political cadre. All available evidence suggests that the Vietnam Communist Party continues to control and manipulate this issue for economic and political concessions. For instance, much of the money paid to Hanoi for JTF-FA activities is being sent by the U.S. Navy Regional Contracting Office in Singapore through the Bank of America to the account of the External Affairs section of the Communist party. Further, evidence of a complex wartime record keeping system indicates that Vietnam could provide important information on many of the 305 discrepancy cases, as well as crash sites and grave sites, and could rapidly account for a significant number of MIA cases.

The amount of influence that Vietnam's efforts have had on post-war policy-level decisions made in Washington can only be assessed by comparing concessions made to Vietnam by the White House with those made to the United States by the Politburo in Vietnam. Despite having received significant concessions from the current administration, the Vietnamese have

continued to slowly release to U.S. government officials small, piecemeal increments of remains and records. The obvious implication is that those critical of U.S. Government claims to the effect that Vietnam is cooperating on the POW/MIA issue, are to a degree at least, justified in maintaining their views. If Hanoi strategists are successful in gaining the "active support of a small part of the population," by exploiting either economic greed or the desire for political influence by key officials within the White House or the American business and veterans communities, but nevertheless are unable to gain the "passive support" of the population at large, there is likely to be lingering controversy on the POW/MIA issue for many years into the future.

¹ Initially, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) was the U.S. government agency responsible for the POW/MIA issue. The Defense Department in 1992 created a new office outside of DIA, DPMO, specifically to handle this issue. Specialists of the DIA working on this issue from the war years have now been incorporated into this office.

² "A Zero-based Comprehensive Review of Cases Involving Unaccounted for Americans in Southeast Asia," Report by Department of Defense (DOD), November 13, 1995, p. 1. Hereafter referred to as "Zero-based."

³ A check of the Institute for Scientific Information's Index to Social Scientific Technical Papers (ISSTP) database of published papers revealed no papers on the Vietnam War POW/MIA issue over the last five years.

⁴ The CIA maintains an office for monitoring foreign news media, called the "Foreign Broadcast Information Service," or FBIS. During the war, U.S. intelligence identified many captured servicemen held in North Vietnam through FBIS monitoring of communist media.

⁵ Known as the Combined Document Exploitation Center, or CDEC by its' military acronym, an enormous volume of enemy documents were screened, translated, reproduced on microfilm, and studied for any intelligence value. The documents were summarized and published in daily "Bulletins," with each separate document having its' own Log Number. Some CDEC documents found in archives outside the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) often are missing Bulletin numbers or were issued as Intelligence Information Reports (IIR). The authors have attempted to be as detailed as possible in providing the proper citations for the CDEC material. The collection, consisting of 955 reels of microfilm, currently resides at the NARA II in College Park, MD in Record Group 472, Records of the United States Military Forces in SE Asia, 1950-1975, and at the William Joiner Center in Boston, MA. Paper copies of the Bulletins and selected translated documents through 1967 are also located at NARA II.

⁶ Pike, Douglas. PAVN: Peoples Army of Vietnam, Presidio Press, 1986, p.153.

⁷ "Experience gained in capturing U.S. prisoners," Captured North Vietnamese documents of the Combined Documents Exploitation Center (CDEC), Bulletin #29,649, Document Log #02-2090-70, Roll 941, RG 472, NARA II, College Park, MD. Hereafter referred to as "CDEC."

⁸ Controlled American Source (CAS) report, FVS 33,092. This CIA interrogation report probably originated at the National Interrogation Center (NIC), the joint CIO/CIA interrogation center in Saigon. This document can be located in the Indochina Archive and is in the authors' possession.

⁹ "Viet Cong Policy Toward and Exploitation of U.S. Prisoners of War," CIA Intelligence Information Report, dated 14 March 1967, NSF Country File, Vietnam, Folder 81, Document 70, p.4, LBJ Library, Austin, TX. This document is also located in the new CIA FOIA system called MORI, (Management of Released Information). Due to heavy and often uneven redaction policies, CIA cables are often missing cable numbers and other identifying media. Again, the authors have attempted to provide as much information to the reader as possible to assist in identifying the documents. All CIA Intelligence Information Reports hereafter referred to as "CIA Cable."

¹⁰ "NLF Instructions on Treatment of American Prisoners." This captured document can be found in the Indochina Archive, Unit 2, Section 8, POW/MIA file I2/63, Institute for East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, CA. The Archive document collection currently resides at the Center for the Study of the Vietnam Conflict at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.

¹¹ "Guide for Interrogation of US Prisoners of War, Military Proselytizing Section, VC MR-5," CDEC Bulletin #48,829, Log #4-1654-72, RG 472, NARA II, College Park, MD. The partial translation of this document, along with the original notebook, can viewed on Reel 903. Hereafter referred to as "Guide."

¹² The CNC was PAVN's main intelligence organization. CNC agents were designed to gather intelligence on logistics, strategy, plans, and operations. The CNC will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

¹³ Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), Command History 1967, Vol. II, page 979-980.

¹⁴ "Viet Cong Policy and Treatment of Prisoners of War," CAS Field report FVS-17,512, dated 24 July 1968, Reel 78, Vietnam-era POW/MIA Documentation Collection, Photoduplication Set, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. There are two sets of POW/MIA microfilm at the Library of Congress. One set is managed by the Photoduplication service (PDS), the other by the Federal Research Division (FRD). Hereafter referred to as "PDS" or "FRD," and "L.O.C."

¹⁵ "VC Treatment of US Prisoners of War," Strategic Research & Analysis Division, Directorate of Intelligence Production, dated 15 October 1969, p. 2, quoting a captured document.

¹⁶ Rand report RM-5729-I-ARPA, "Prisoners of War in Indochina," dated January, 1969, p. 6.

¹⁷ State Department cable 3032, From Amembassy Paris To Secstate: Subject: Repatriation of French Remains from North Vietnam, dated 041725Z Mar 76.

¹⁸ State Department cable 3032, p. 4.

¹⁹ "The Responsibilities of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam Intelligence and Security Services in the Exploitation of American Prisoners of War," Central Intelligence Agency study, dated 17 November 1975, Roll 513, Folder 32, p. 3-6, PDS, L.O.C. This study of the DRV's intelligence services was done using interrogation reports from captured or rallied enemy prisoners who had directly participated in the handling of American POWs. Unfortunately, when the CIA released the document, they did not include the footnotes listing the sources used to compile the report. However, the author's are very familiar with the information given to the U.S. by the rallier Dr. Dang Tan, who was by the Agency's admission a prolific reporter who provided them with the best picture of the inner working of the DRV MPS system for U.S. POWs. Much of Dr. Tan's material appears in this report. Apparently, in 1975 the CIA still regarded Dr. Tan's information as important and factual. Hereafter referred to as "Responsibilities."

²⁰ Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) Directive #165. This captured document is located in the Indochina Archive, POW/MIA file for 1/73.

²¹ Responsibilities, p. 6.

²² Radio Hanoi Broadcast, July 6, 1988, monitored and reported by Special Assistant Bill Bell.

²³ "Viet Cong Instructions regarding Management and Exploitation of Prisoners captured in Binh Dinh Province," CIA cable TDCS 314/04542-72, dated 15 June 1972, MORI database, p. 6.

²⁴ "Summary of Activities, North Vietnamese Intelligence Services, (1 Oct 69-30 Jun 70)," Headquarters, USARPAC, dated 1 November 1970, p. 3.

²⁵ "Delineation of Responsibilities of the North Vietnamese Army Enemy Proselytizing Department, the *Cuc Nghien Cuu*, and the Ministry of Public Security in the Handling and Interrogation of US POWs in NVN," CIA cable, dated 15 July 1970, Reel 320, Folder 27, p. 1, PDS, L.O.C.

²⁶ DTG020728Z Apr 93, From CJTF-FA Det One Bangkok Thailand, To CDR JTF-FA Honolulu, HI, Subj: SRV Oral History, LTC Huynh Khac Chieu by JTF-FA Special Assistant (SA) Bill Bell, Ben Tre City, SRV. Bell was tasked to institute an Oral History program of senior SRV cadre, and spoke to over twenty senior Vietnamese cadre before leaving the JTF-FA. All interviews hereafter referred to as "Oral History."

²⁷ "South Vietnam Liberation Army (SVNLA) Directive I/H Exporting Subregion 1 Troops to Capture Many Prisoners of War, Particularly Americans, to Serve the Political and Diplomatic Struggles," CIA cable, dated 24 June 1971, MORI database, p. 2.

²⁸ "Public Presentation of U.S. Prisoners of War," Vietnam Document and Research Notes, Document 65, dated August 1969, p. 3.

²⁹ "South Vietnam Liberation Army Enemy Proselytizing Office Handling of Prisoners of War," CIA cable, dated 25 March 1971, MORI database, p. 3. Note: At the Central government level in Hanoi, Enemy Proselytizing was considered a department, i.e., *Cuc*, abbreviated by wartime analysts as EPD. At COSVN in the South, Enemy Proselytizing was considered an office, i.e., *Phong*, abbreviated as PDV.

³⁰ "Military Proselytizing Instructional Material," CDEC Bulletin #3826, CDEC Log #04-2212-67, Reel 907, RG 472, NARA II, College Park, MD.

³¹ DTG 051223Z Apr 93, Oral History interview with Major General Vo Van Thoi, by SA Bill Bell, Saigon, SRV.

- ³² "Intelligence and Security Operations of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Ministry of National Defense Enemy Proselytizing Department," CIA Study, dated December 1979, Reel 513, Folder 33, p. 8, PDS, L.O.C.
- ³³ Guide, p. 2.
- ³⁴ "VCI of the Military Proselytizing Section, Quang Ngai Province Party Committee, MR 5," Records of the Combined Military Interrogation Center (CMIC) Intelligence Information Report (IIR) 6 029 0007 72, Box 51, RG 472, NARA, Suitland, MD.
- ³⁵ DOD Uncorrelated Reports, IIR 6 075 1405 66, dated 6 Jun 66, Co C, 519 MI BN, Vol. IX, p. 54.
- ³⁶ MACV Command History 1972-1973, Annex A, p. A-39.
- ³⁷ Radio Propaganda Report, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Research Series, RS.81, 9 Mar 66.
- ³⁸ "Resolution on the people's security missions adopted by TV KBN," CDEC Doc Log No. 07-1272-72, Current Affairs Committee of the MPS, 11 Apr 72.
- ³⁹ This individual in charge of the Penetration sub-section in Ms. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Suong, who is mentioned later in greater depth.
- ⁴⁰ J-2 Weekly Intelligence Estimate Update (WIEU) for 13 February 1971, p. 43-44, CDEC Roll 876, NARA II, College Park, MD.
- ⁴¹ Oral History interview with LTC Huynh Khac Chieu, p. 2.
- ⁴² "Hearings before the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs," December 4, 1992, p. 1221.
- ⁴³ "Sharpening the Third Prong: An Increase in Viet Cong Proselytizing," Vietnam Documents and Research Notes, Document 18, February 1968, p. 3.
- ⁴⁴ "Thim Hai's directive on proselytizing and treatment of Pws," CDEC Bulletin #1224, CDEC Log #10-1376-66, Reel 915, RG 472, NARA II, College Park, MD.
- ⁴⁵ DTG 220750Z December 92, SRV Oral History Interview with Major Pham Van Khoi by SA Bill Bell, Hanoi, SRV. Bell spoke on many occasions with Major Khoi concerning Vietnamese wartime organizational structure. Major Khoi was a member of Office 22, Group 875, and was involved with field grade U.S. POWs during the war.
- ⁴⁶ DTG 091842Z August 1993, Oral History interview of Mr. Nguyen Hung Tri by Robert DeStatte, Hanoi, SRV, p. 6. Mr. Tri was a former PAVN 2LT attached to Headquarters, SVNLA, and was the interpreter at the U.S. POW camp unit TB-20. As of this report, Mr. Tri was the Director, Export Department, Vietnam National Petroleum Import-Export Corporation.
- ⁴⁷ DTG 261015Z January 93, Oral History interview with Senior Colonel Pham Van Ban, aka Ba (3) Ban, by SA Bill Bell, Hanoi, SRV. Col. Ban was the second in command of the Enemy Proselytizing Section of COSVN for a large portion of the war.
- ⁴⁸ "South Vietnam Liberation Army Enemy Proselytizing Office Handling of Prisoners of War," CIA cable, 25 Mar 71.
- ⁴⁹ Captured document found in Case file of Robert Garwood, PDS set, Reel 1, L.O.C.
- ⁵⁰ DTG 051936Z January 94, Oral History interview with Nguyen Dinh Trang by TSGT Ronald Ward, Danang, SRV.
- ⁵¹ It must be noted that some cadre did not view the attempt to persuade Americans to cross over as very successful. One Oral History interview with Vietnamese cadre member To Dieu notes that after meeting Bobby Garwood, he realized that this Enemy Proselytizing goal was incompatible in terms of results.
- ⁵² Vietnamese documents turned over in 1995.
- ⁵³ Task Force Russia document TFR-136-11.
- ⁵⁴ "Comments of a COSVN Cadre on Communist Utilization of U.S. Prisoners of War Released to Foster Communist Propaganda Objectives," CIA cable CS 317/09008/72, Reel 354, FRD, L.O.C.
- ⁵⁵ "Toan Dan Thi Dua Lam Cong Tac Binh Van" (All People Emulate the Work of Proselytizing the Troops) undated, National Liberation Front document, Indochina Archive.
- ⁵⁶ "North Vietnamese Policy on Prisoners of War," CIA cable, 8 February 1977, MORI database, p. 2.
- ⁵⁷ "Policy towards US POW's," CDEC Bulletin #7131, CDEC Log #09-1134-67, NARA II, College Park, MD.
- ⁵⁸ Intelligence Report, Sub: Prisoner of War Questionnaire Used by the Military Proselytizing Section, Front 7, Quang Tri Province, 15 Sep 69.
- ⁵⁹ Stephen Young, interview with Bui Tin, The Asian Wall Street Journal, August 3, 1995.
- ⁶⁰ "Proselytizing in SR-1," IIR 1 516 0628 70, dated 14 June 1970.

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- ⁶¹ "Collection of Personal Belongings of US Servicemen," CDEC Bulletin #5783, CDEC Log #06-4188-67, NARA II, College Park, MD.
- ⁶² "Handling of US KIA, MR V," CDEC Bulletin #6450, CDEC Log #07-3510-67, NARA II, College Park, MD.
- ⁶³ "Personnel effects of U.S. Servicemen," CDEC Document found in the Indochina Archive, no Bulletin number or Document number listed.
- ⁶⁴ Stars and Stripes, 18 December 1967, p. 6.
- ⁶⁵ "Lao Company 18 to disinterred the remains of Americans killed at Phou Pha Thi," NSA intercept dated 6 June 1977, PDS, Reel 271, L.O.C.
- ⁶⁶ "Records Maintained by a Senior Lao Government and Communist Party Official Listing American MIA from the War in Lao," CIA cable dated 20 June 1977, p. 2.
- ⁶⁷ DTG 040928Z Sep 87, FM USDAO Bangkok To DIA, "Vietnamese seize Laotian PW/MIA records," IIR 6 024 0136 87, p. 2.
- ⁶⁸ Intelligence and Security Operations of the SRV Ministry of National Defense, December, 1979, p. 33.
- ⁶⁹ Oral History interview with Col. Doan Hanh, former commander Office 22, Group 875, dated 28 Apr 93.
- ⁷⁰ "The Military Justice Department of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) Ministry of National Defense; Past and Present Responsibilities for the Detention of Prisoners; Past Guarding of U.S. Prisoners of War (DOI:1964-June 1981)," CIA cable, dated 8 September 1982, PDS, Reel 320, Folder 4, p. 2, L.O.C.
- ⁷¹ Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii Memo, dated 8 April 1991. (Document in author's possession.)
- ⁷² Letter from Jerry Mooney to the authors, dated January 28, 1996. The authors would like to thank Mr. Mooney for sharing his expertise on the PAVN's Air Defense forces with us.
- ⁷³ Garner, Joe R. Code Name: Copperhead, My True-Life Exploits as a Special Forces Soldier, Simon and Schuster, New York, NY, 1994, p. 285-286.
- ⁷⁴ "Past policies of the Hanoi Government regarding U.S. personnel taken as prisoners of war or missing in action," CIA cable, no date, PDS, Reel 320, Folder 9, p. 4. L.O.C.
- ⁷⁵ "Exchange of Intelligence Information by North Vietnam with Soviet Bloc Countries and Communist China between 1958 and 1968," CIA cable, dated 30 April 1973, PDS, Reel 513, Folder 27, p. 5. L.O.C.
- ⁷⁶ Exchange of Intelligence Information, p. 3.
- ⁷⁷ Responsibilities, page 20.
- ⁷⁸ Stern, Lewis M. "Imprisoned or Missing in Vietnam: Policies of the Vietnamese Government Concerning Captured or Unaccounted for United States Soldiers, 1969-1994," McFarland and Co., Jefferson, NC, p. 85.
- ⁷⁹ "Khep Lai Qua Khu Dau Thuong," (Closing the Painful Past), SRV Ministry of Information and Culture Publishing House, 1994
- ⁸⁰ Zero-based, p. 3.
- ⁸¹ Survey Conducted by the Joint Casualty Resolution Center, undated, by JCRC members Raymond Spock & Joe Harvey. (Document in the author's possession).
- ⁸² "Americans Missing in Indochina: An Assessment of Vietnamese Accountability," Defense Intelligence Agency, Special Office for Prisoner of War and Missing in Action, undated, FRD, Reel 304, p. 8, L.O.C. This study was probably completed in 1990. Hereafter referred to as "Accountability."
- ⁸³ Accountability, p. 10.
- ⁸⁴ Defense Intelligence Agency, Records and Remains Brief, 22 May 1992. (Document in the author's possession).
- ⁸⁵ Gen. John Vessey memo for Secretary Baker, Secretary Cheney, and General Scowcroft, 12 January 1992. (Document in the author's possession).
- ⁸⁶ "The Organization, Mission, and Threat of Enemy Military & Civilian Proselytizing," Strategic Research and Analysis 0169, dated 26 Aug. 69.
- ⁸⁷ Zero-based, p. 4.
- ⁸⁸ Report of the Arkansas POW/MIA Verification Task Force Delegation Visit to Hanoi, Vietnam, dated September 9-16, 1994. (Document in the author's possession.)
- ⁸⁹ HQ, U.S. Pacific Command, Deputy for POW/MIA Affairs J/30M, dated 3 August 1994. (Document in the author's possession.)

⁹⁰VA ltr dated October 26, 1995, from Phillip Riggan, Special Asst to the Secretary.