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*National Intelligence Estimate*

**Vietnamese Intentions, Capabilities,  
and Performance Concerning the  
POW/MIA Issue (U)**

*Produced by the National Intelligence Council*

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AUTHOR

VIA OFFICE PRODUCTION STAFF

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## **Vietnamese Intentions, Capabilities, and Performance Concerning the POW/MIA Issue (U)**

**This Estimate was approved for publication by the  
National Foreign Intelligence Board under the  
authority of the Director of Central Intelligence.** [REDACTED]

*This National Intelligence Estimate was prepared  
under the auspices of [REDACTED] National  
Intelligence Officer for East Asia.* [REDACTED]

## Scope Note

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### Vietnamese Intentions, Capabilities, and Performance Concerning the POW/MIA Issue (U)

This National Intelligence Estimate was requested by Samuel R. Berger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, in conjunction with the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. It addresses two key questions:

- Since 1987, to what extent has the leadership of the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) demonstrated a commitment to cooperating with the United States to achieve the fullest possible accounting of American personnel missing in action during the Vietnam conflict?
- What is the Intelligence Community's assessment of the so-called "1205" and "735" documents from the Russian archives? (These two intelligence reports raised troubling questions about whether all American prisoners of war (POWs) were released during "Operation Homecoming" in 1973 by citing substantially higher numbers of live American prisoners in Hanoi than were ultimately released.) [REDACTED]

This NIE differs from standard estimative papers in that it has an historical focus rather than projecting forward to the future. Some of the judgments it reaches are based upon assessments made by experienced American officials rather than upon a sizable body of intelligence reporting. In some cases we had to consider intelligence reporting that is as much as 25 years old [REDACTED]

For these and other reasons, there are important gaps in our knowledge of these sensitive issues, and our judgments must therefore be cautious. Accordingly, the Estimate contains a lengthy annex on methodology that describes available information, intelligence gaps, and how the judgments were reached. [REDACTED]

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## Key Judgments

### Vietnamese Intentions, Capabilities, and Performance Concerning the POW/MIA Issue [REDACTED]

Since the early 1990s, we have seen evidence for increased Vietnamese cooperation on the POW/MIA issue in the strengthened staffing, increased responsiveness, and growing professionalization of the Vietnamese organizations that deal with this issue:

- In our view, Hanoi judges that better ties to the United States are in Vietnam's own security and economic development interests and that normalization requires progress on the POW/MIA issue.
- US financial support for cooperative action and willingness to agree to reciprocity on Vietnamese humanitarian concerns also encourage cooperation.

Consequently, we judge that Vietnam has become more helpful in assisting US efforts to achieve the fullest possible accounting of American personnel missing in action during the Vietnam conflict. On the issue of recovering and repatriating remains of US personnel, we rate Vietnamese cooperation as excellent. Cooperation also has been good on assisting with trilateral investigations and providing documents (see table on page 7). [REDACTED]

We think Hanoi's decision to be more cooperative with the United States on POW/MIA accounting has not come easily to the Vietnamese leaders. Longstanding ideological distrust, animosity lingering from the war, suspicion of American motives, and fear of intelligence exploitation all have operated at times to limit Vietnam's willingness to cooperate on recovering or accounting for US MIAs. But our reporting suggests that the POW/MIA issue no longer has the political sensitivity it once had. [REDACTED]

Incidents of outright refusal to cooperate with US investigators have decreased, but there are still instances in which the Vietnamese raise objections to POW/MIA activities. In most cases, the Vietnamese cite considerations of sovereignty—for example, in refusing to make internal Politburo documents accessible to US investigators; security, such as not allowing US officials to enter classified locations and facilities; or technical

problems, such as difficulty in locating documents or records. Occasionally the Vietnamese state that local villagers are concerned about the intrusive nature of investigations and recovery activities. [REDACTED]

Moreover, although Vietnam's performance generally has improved with respect to the US POW/MIA issue, we think Hanoi has not been completely forthcoming on certain POW/MIA matters:

- In some instances, we believe full disclosure would prove embarrassing to the regime. For example, Hanoi continues to deny that US POWs were mistreated while in captivity in the North.
- We think Vietnam still has records it could make available to US investigators but which would discredit its denials of mistreatment.
- A few reports of transfers of US POWs to Russia and other countries are unexplained, and the books remain open. [REDACTED]

Although 120 live-sighting investigations have been carried out by US teams, none has generated any credible evidence of American POWs left in Vietnam. Hanoi protests having to investigate such cases, but reports appear regularly—most recently on five POWs possibly being held in Laos—and established procedures for resolving them continue to be in effect. [REDACTED]

Although Vietnam's overall performance in dealing with the POW/MIA problem has been good in recent years, the unresolved issues noted above suggest the need for continued close attention by the US Government. [REDACTED]

We assess continued progress in POW/MIA accounting will require overcoming two types of obstacles:

- Technical problems, such as difficulty in retrieving archival materials, contacting leads, and conducting field activities by the Joint Task Force—Full Accounting (JTF-FA), are more amenable to resolution than political obstacles. Not all can be overcome—the passage of time and geographic change increase the difficulty of recovery operations—but some can be overcome through improving technology, maintaining US financial commitment, and supporting continued professionalization on the Vietnamese side.

**Figure 1**  
**Summary Evaluation: Vietnamese Cooperation**  
**With the United States on POW/MIA Accounting** [REDACTED]

Element	Level of Cooperation	Comments
Joint field activities; recovery and repatriation of remains	Excellent	Has been improving since early 1990s; increasing professionalism on part of Vietnamese.
Assisting with trilateral investigations	Good	Vietnamese work hard to obtain Laotian cooperation in recovery efforts.
Providing documents, personal artifacts, and equipment	Good	Vietnamese have willingly provided numerous documents but probably are holding out on those that would embarrass the government.
Making officials available for interviews	Fair to good	Some retired officials may resist interviews.
Live-sighting	Reluctant, but cooperation still reasonably good	Vietnamese resent live-sighting investigations and question their utility.
Transfer of POWs to Soviet Union	Uncertain	Vietnamese say none were transferred, but issue remains open.

Source: US officials responsible for carrying out research, investigation, and joint recovery operations of American POW/MIAs.

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- Overcoming political obstacles—such as Vietnam’s sensitivities about infringements on its sovereignty and obstructionist tendencies on archival research and live-sighting reports—will be more difficult. In the past, Vietnam has reacted best to straightforwardness combined with respect and US acknowledgment of Hanoi’s own MIA accounting efforts. [REDACTED]

We have reviewed the so-called “1205” and “735” documents, which purport—falsely in our view—to be reports to the party leadership containing statements that Hanoi held large numbers of US POWs above those acknowledged to the United States. We believe the judgments in the 1993 Intelligence Community assessment released by the Department of Defense (DOD) remain valid: that the documents are probably authentic

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GRU (Soviet Military Intelligence)-collected documents. But many of the details of the documents, including dates and other facts, are implausible or inconsistent with reliable evidence. In particular, the numbers of POWs allegedly held by Hanoi at the times mentioned are inconsistent with reliable US Government statistics and far outnumber the actual total of open cases. We believe that neither document provides a factual foundation upon which to judge Vietnamese performance on the POW/MIA question. [REDACTED]

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## Discussion

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### Part I: The Question of Vietnamese Cooperation [REDACTED]

Since 1987, Vietnam's attitude and overall approach toward cooperation with the United States on prisoners of war or missing in action (POW/MIA) issues have improved. [REDACTED]

First and foremost is the improved staff professionalism and efficiency of the Vietnamese agencies that deal with US POW/MIA issues. [REDACTED]

Over the last 10 years this situation has changed substantially. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Officials are increasingly professional and are upwardly mobile in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of the Interior. Many Foreign Ministry junior personnel receive training there. According to US officials, many Vietnamese officials who work POW/MIA issues have demonstrated skill and initiative. [REDACTED]

Hanoi has been moving toward better cooperation since that time for a variety of reasons, but particularly since 1992—when the United States began seriously to discuss easing trade

restrictions and normalizing relations—Vietnam has become more cooperative in assisting the United States locate and recover the remains of MIAs. Also, the easing of bilateral tensions after the Paris Agreement on Cambodia in 1991 (which ended Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia) created a climate more conducive to Vietnamese cooperation. We assess that Vietnam has become more cooperative for these reasons:

- Hanoi wants engagement with Washington, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had been Vietnam's key ally and supporter. Vietnam now perceives cooperative relations with the United States to be essential for furthering its economic and security objectives. Vietnamese leaders recognize that Washington will be a key power in the region, and American business is a potential major source of investment. They recognize that better cooperation on the POW/MIA issue is central to Washington's ability to forge a better bilateral relationship. Normalization of relations has generally reinforced Vietnam's willingness to improve cooperation.
- The effort does not place any great demand on Vietnam's own limited resources. The United States provides financial backing for cooperative endeavors to account for MIAs—about \$9.5 million annually to underwrite

*The 1992 CIA Study* [REDACTED]

*Some of the highlights of the Key Judgments of the CIA Study, Vietnam: Adjusting Its Strategy on the POW/MIA Issue, of January 1992, include:*

*During the past four years, Vietnam has become more cooperative in resolving questions concerning US military personnel reported as possible prisoners of war or missing in action (POWs/MIAs) in the Vietnam war. The government has made several important gestures since 1988, including turning over more remains and material evidence than during the preceding 13 years; participating, for the first time, in joint investigations of sites where American planes crashed or missing US servicemen were last seen; and, beginning in 1990, giving US experts limited access to military museums and archives containing records detailing Vietnamese investigations of American losses.*



*Even under the best of circumstances, there are limits to what the United States could expect to achieve.* [REDACTED]



joint recovery efforts in Vietnam. Most of this goes to Vietnam to fund the five joint field activities held annually. [REDACTED]

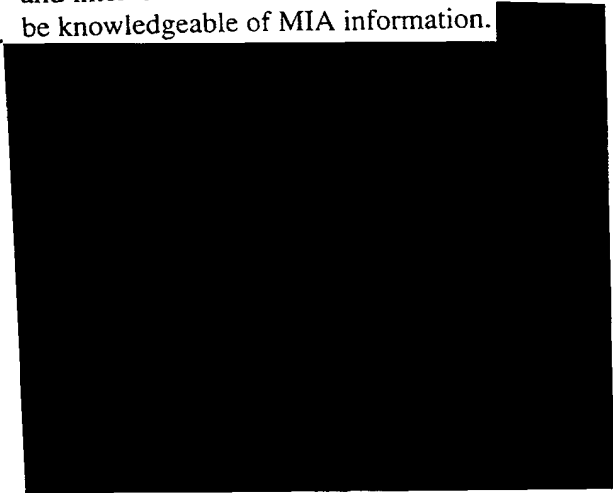
Vietnam's more cooperative approach was observed by CIA analysts in the early 1990s (see inset). Since then, reciprocal actions by the US and Vietnamese Governments have fostered an even better climate for approaching the POW/MIA issue:

- The US "Hanoi Office" (US MIA Office) was opened in June 1991.
- In March 1992, Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam told the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific that Vietnam would expand cooperation with the United States on POW/MIA issues. The two sides agreed on a 24-month recovery/repatriation program, a mechanism to investigate live-sighting reports, and a process for providing US humanitarian aid to Vietnam.
- In July 1993, Vietnam received the highest level US delegation since the end of the Vietnam war and agreed to allow US State Department officials to be stationed in Hanoi to assist JTF-FA activities.
- In May 1994, Vietnam agreed to opening a US liaison office in Hanoi to facilitate progress on POW/MIA accounting and as a prelude to diplomatic relations. US officials arrived in August, and the office formally opened in January 1995. [REDACTED]

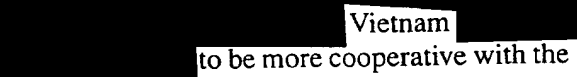

<sup>1</sup> According to JTF-FA estimates, since FY 1995 each field recovery activity in Vietnam has cost about US \$1.6 million. [REDACTED]

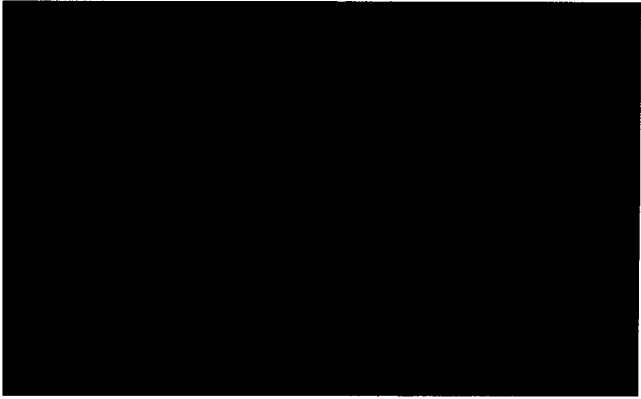
### Responding To US Government Accounting Efforts

Since 1992, Hanoi also has become much more cooperative in allowing US officials to meet and interview Vietnamese citizens who could be knowledgeable of MIA information.







### Recent Vietnamese Intentions


 Vietnam  to be more cooperative with the United States on POW/MIA accounting. This decision has not come easily to the Hanoi Government, in our view. Longstanding ideological distrust, animosity lingering from the war, suspicion of American motives, and fear of intelligence exploitation all have operated at times to limit Vietnam's willingness to cooperate on recovering or accounting for US MIAs. Vietnamese officials frequently point to the disparity between their work to recover missing American soldiers and efforts to account for their own, which number more than 300,000. They must also overcome interbureaucratic rivalries and central-local disputes to maximize their cooperation. But our reporting indicates to us that the POW/MIA issue no longer has the political sensitivity it once had. (S)



A good indicator of Vietnamese intentions is the degree to which Vietnamese officials have undertaken unilateral efforts—that is, efforts without direct participation by the JTF-FA—to assist in locating remains of US MIAs.

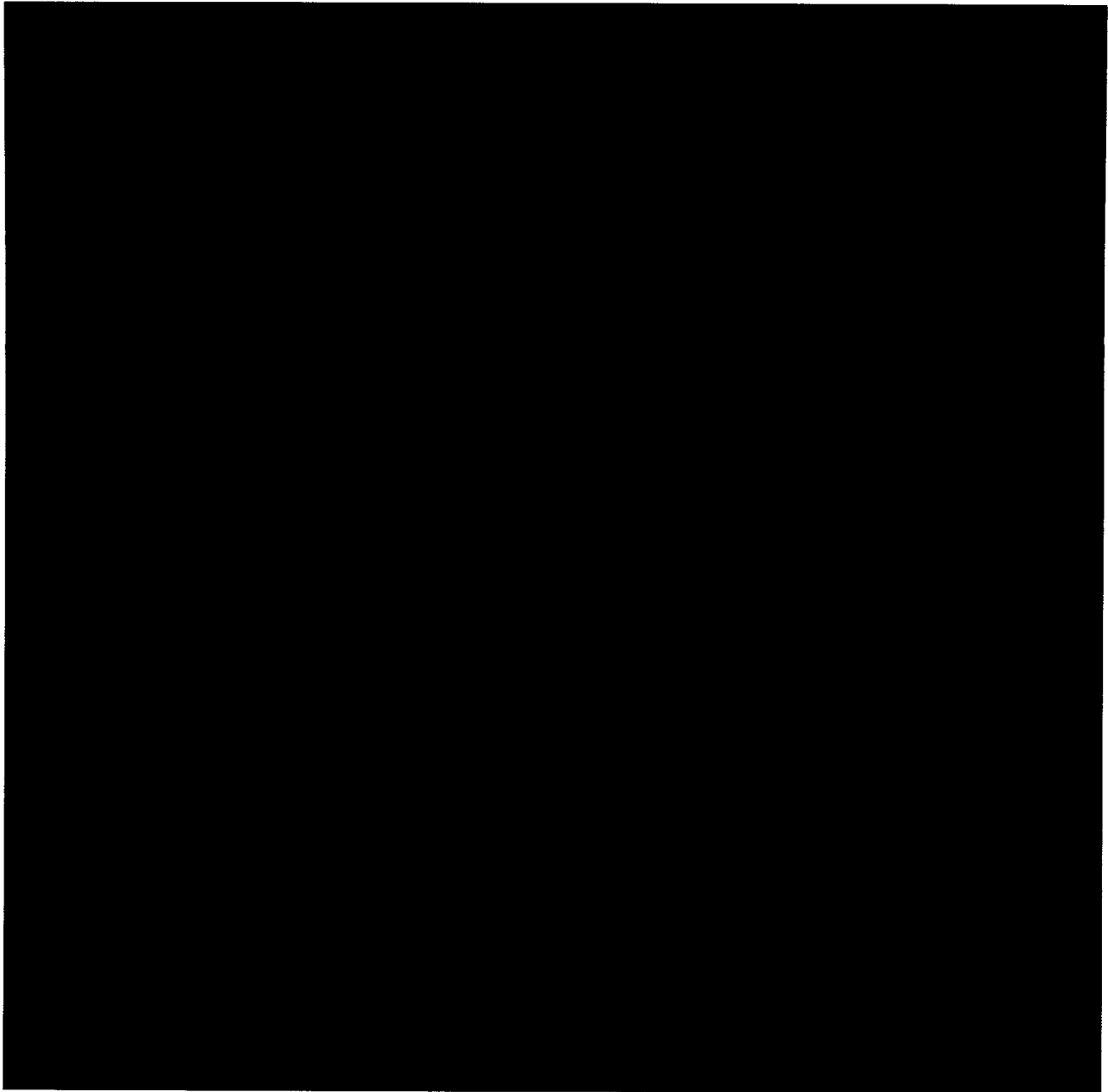
 US officials at JTF-FA suggest  that the Vietnamese side has worked energetically to follow up leads and schedule field activities to locate and recover remains. In some instances, Vietnamese on recovery teams have willingly worked beyond the terms of their contracts to successfully complete operations (see inset on page 17). 

Cultural reasons, in addition to official policy, contributes to this record. Families are of great importance to the Vietnamese. Vietnamese workers who participate in the field recovery efforts frequently express respect for US efforts to recover remains of American dead. 

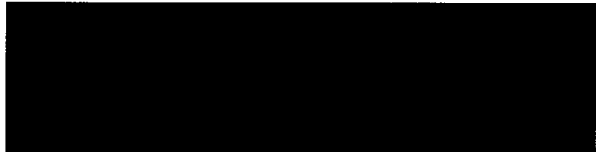


For local officials, participation in joint field activities can be financially profitable. People in their villages can earn much more by

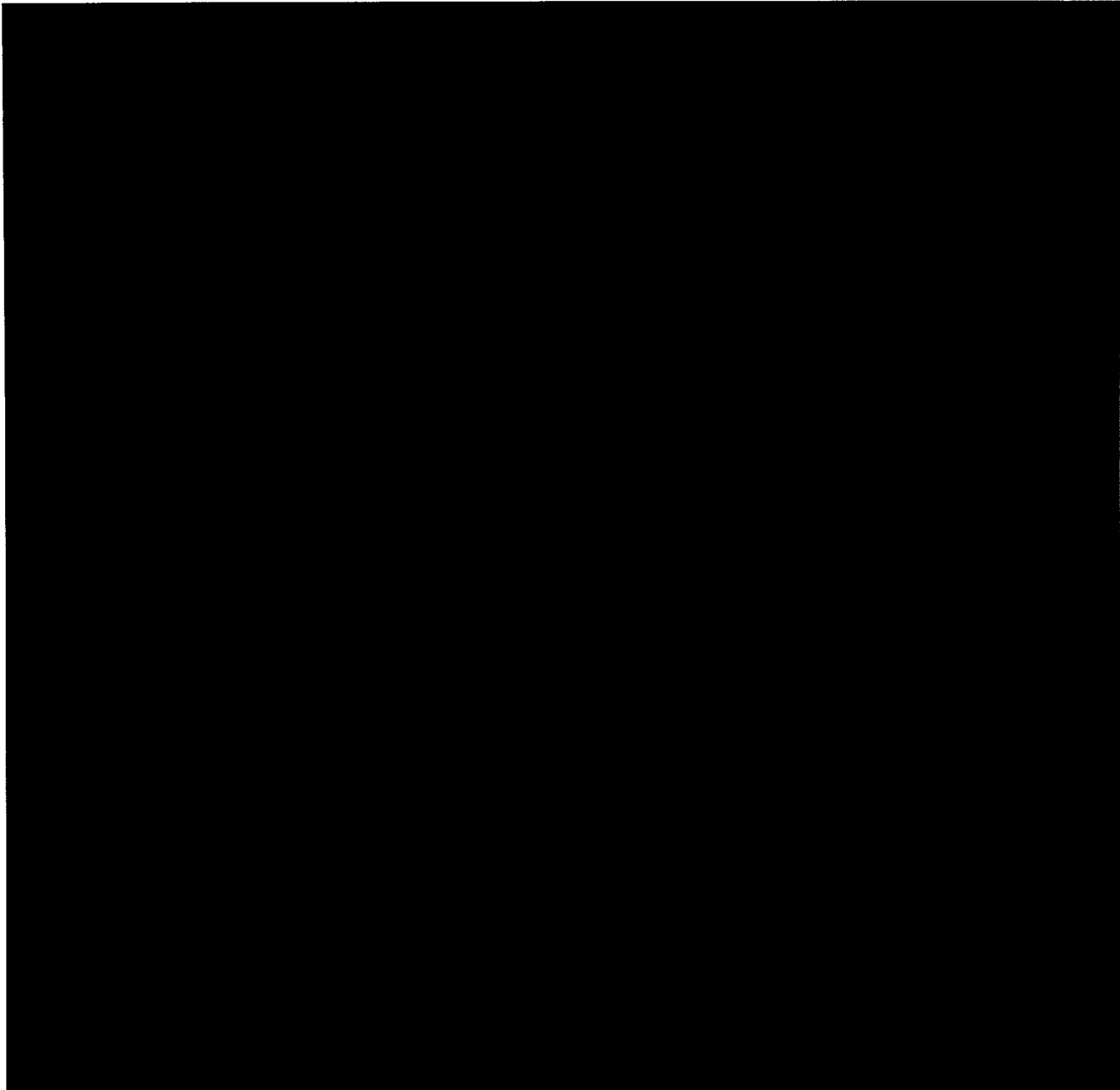
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working on the activity than they could in their normal work. Local officials usually seek to parcel out work force assignments based on kinship ties and other traditional connections.

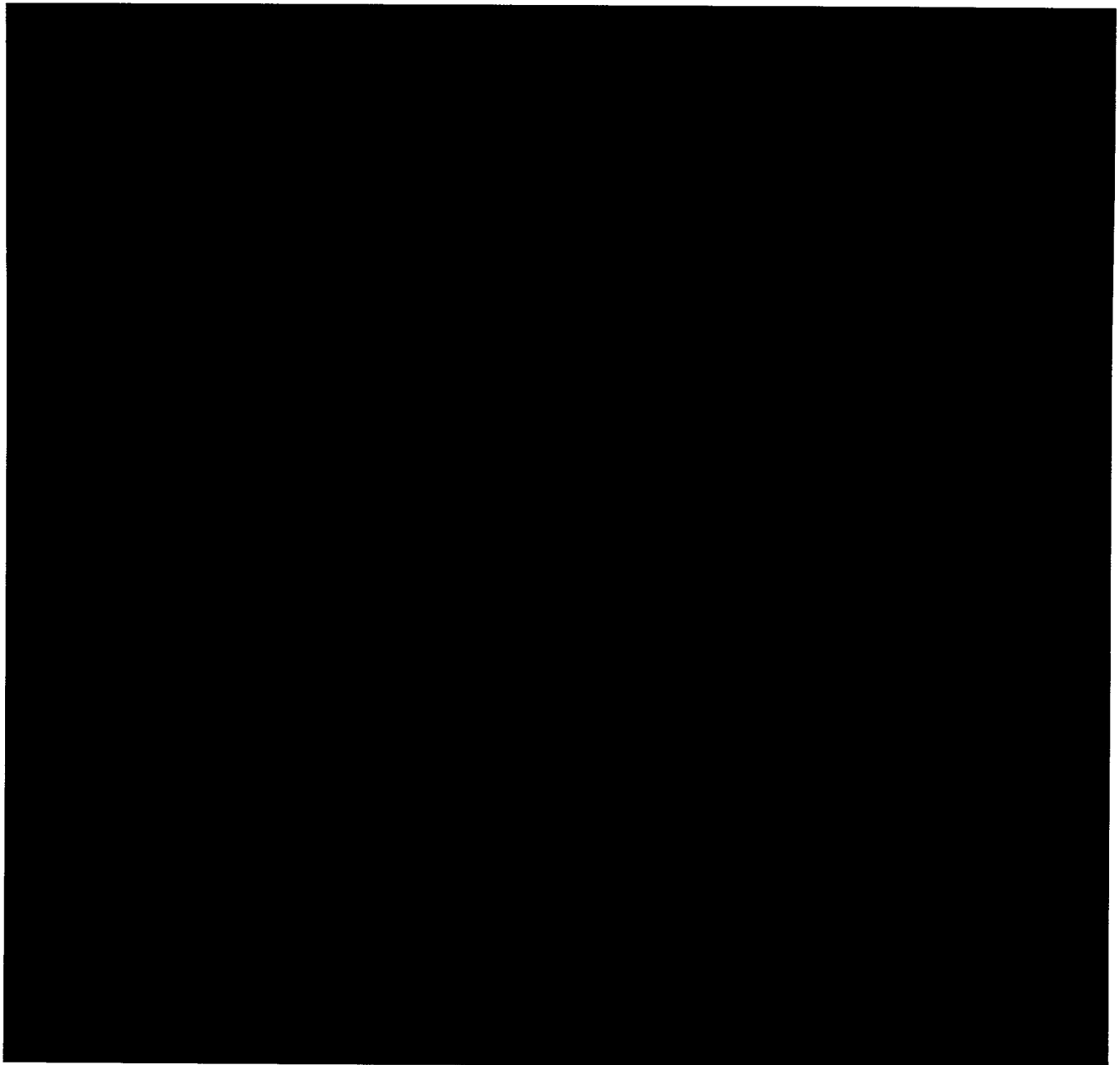


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**Instances of Vietnamese Noncooperation**  
Vietnam's Marxist-Leninist political system is habitually secretive and distrustful of foreign influences, fearful that any information it

divulges may be used to undermine its authority, punish its past behavior, or embarrass it politically. In our view, it is adept at defending



its sovereignty and protecting its secrets. That said, there have been few instances in which Vietnamese authorities have flatly refused US requests concerning an accounting for MIAs. Vietnamese tend to avoid direct refusals. Rather, they indirectly decline US requests by asserting that Vietnam will undertake unilateral

measures to achieve the accounting the US seeks. Among the most significant examples:

- Although Vietnam has provided thousands of documents to the US side, US requests to see Politburo documents pertaining to US POW/



MIA issues have been turned aside. The Vietnamese insist that these records are sensitive and can not be directly viewed by foreigners. Vietnamese authorities have said they will research the records and provide relevant

POW/MIA information, [REDACTED]

- Vietnamese authorities have not facilitated interviews with some senior retired military officers whom US officials think could provide POW/MIA information. Vietnamese authorities claim that these retirees do not wish to be interviewed by US officials and in some instances lack knowledge.
- Vietnam does not allow joint field activities in "classified" military areas. Vietnam offers to undertake unilateral searches in these areas when detailed and credible leads are provided. In a few instances, the Vietnamese have been able to provide remains from these locations to US authorities.

[REDACTED]

At the working level, Vietnamese officials are not always amenable to US requests.

[REDACTED]

#### **Vietnam's Bureaucracy: Responsiveness and Resistance**

Our review of the past decade suggests that some key elements of Vietnam's government initially were reluctant to assist the United States in resolving POW/MIA issues. Such

opposition was lessened by Politburo decisions in the early 1990s

[REDACTED]

We occasionally see some hints of continuing dissatisfaction, however. For example, in March 1996 the Army Newspaper *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* warned that the United States was taking advantage of MIA searches to "grasp and exploit many of our secrets." The tone of the article was that cooperation with the United States could threaten Vietnam's interests.

[REDACTED] this statement [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] did suggest that some elements of Vietnam's bureaucracy did not favor full engagement with the United States on POW/MIA issues. Consequently, for cooperation to continue, Vietnamese leaders and VNOSMP officials probably will continue to have to maintain pressure on all elements of the bureaucracy. [REDACTED]

**The Record of SRV Responsiveness**  
*Recovery and Repatriation of Remains.* Vietnamese responsiveness on the recovery and repatriation issue is currently described by JTF-FA officials as excellent. According to Vietnamese figures, since the end of the war, Hanoi



**Vietnamese Initiative in Recovery  
Operations: Recent Examples** [REDACTED]

**Case 1364**

*On 22 January 1969, SP5 Douglas Alan Ross was killed during a combat operation in South Vietnam. His unit was forced to take cover. Other dead and wounded were recovered in an extensive search the next day, but the body of SP5 Ross was not found. He eventually became Case 1364.*

*In January 1994, a joint US-Vietnamese team investigated Case 1364 in La Mo Nong Village, Chu Pa District, Gia Lai Province. The team searched a 600-square-meter area and questioned local residents but found no information.*

*In early July 1997, two Vietnamese villagers reported to Gia Lai Province officials that, while using a metal detector to search for scrap aluminum, they had found the grave of an American. They produced identification tags reading: Ross, Douglas, US 56719861, A, Lutheran. Provincial authorities notified the central government, which then informed the JFT-FA detachment in Hanoi. A joint team was dispatched to Pleiku township on 6 July to question local witnesses and retrieve the remains. These were repatriated in September 1997 and approved for identification by the Armed forces Identification Review Board on 18 February 1998.*

**Case 1927**

*On 24 September 1972, Lt. Daniel Borah's aircraft was hit by antiaircraft fire and*

*crashed into the jungle in North Vietnam. Two other aircraft saw a parachute and heard voice radio transmissions while the parachute was in the air. After the parachute landed in the trees, an emergency beacon was heard for a short time, then silence. Other aircrew saw the parachute pulled down through the trees. Large concentrations of PAVN forces in the area precluded a ground search. Three days of air search and rescue efforts failed to locate any sign of Lt. Borah.*

*In 1991, photographs purporting to be of Lt. Borah and his Lao guard surfaced in Southeast Asia. Borah family members stated that the man in the photos was indeed Lt. Borah. The world press cited this as evidence of live American POWs still in Southeast Asia. Extensive investigation into the origin of the photos, however, revealed that they were in fact a hoax. The individual believed to be Lt. Borah was actually a Lao named Ahrao, as was confirmed in interviews with him.*

*In September 1995, the "Office for Seeking Missing Persons" (VNOSMP) reported that it had located a veteran of an antiaircraft battery whose members had found a dead American pilot named "Borah" and had buried the body. The VNOSMP located a witness to the burial and then provided this information (though not the witness) to US investigators in January 1996. In March, a joint US-Vietnamese team excavated the site and recovered a complete set of remains. The remains were subsequently identified as those of Lt. Daniel Borah.*



Figure 2. A recovery team excavates the site of a B-52 crash just outside Hanoi, Vietnam. ■

Photo Courtesy CILHI

has returned remains to US officials on 67 occasions, totaling 717 sets (not all of which were of US personnel). Since January 1992, when joint recovery operations began in earnest, the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (CILHI) reports that 263 sets of remains have been repatriated. Of these, identification has been completed on 101 sets, while identifications on 25 sets are pending review by Service Secretaries, and 51 sets are undergoing final lab review. Procedures for handling remains have been jointly developed and work smoothly. ■

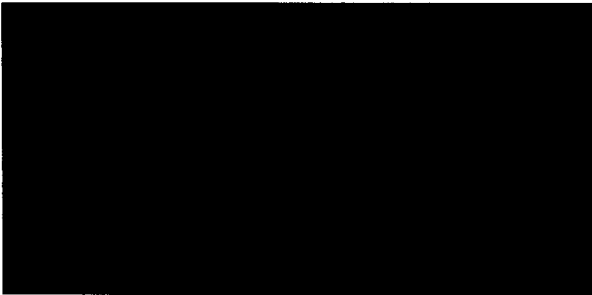
We have no evidence that the Vietnamese presently are storing remains of American dead. A 1987 Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) stated that we had evidence that Vietnam was storing about 400 to 600 sets of remains. But that judgment was retracted in 1996 because it turned out to have been based

on the unsupported testimony of a single unreliable source.<sup>2</sup> The Vietnamese Government collected and stored remains during the Vietnam war, but we do not know how many. A considerable number were returned to various US delegations that visited Vietnam:

- CILHI reports that since the early 1990s there has been no indication of storage in the remains returned by the Vietnamese to the United States, including those sets of remains obtained outside the JTF-FA joint recovery efforts.<sup>3</sup> ■

<sup>2</sup> Intelligence Community Assessment 96-05, *Vietnamese Storage of Remains of Unaccounted US Personnel* (October 1996). ■

<sup>3</sup> DPMO in conjunction with CILHI presently has a study underway to investigate the question of Vietnamese storage of the remains of US personnel. Further conclusions on this issue must await the results of this study. ■

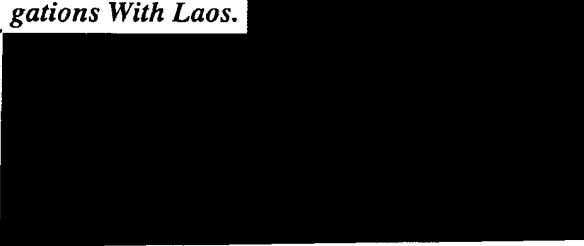


**Resolution of Discrepancy Cases.** According to the Department of Defense POW and Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) data, 48 "priority discrepancy" cases remain to be resolved with Vietnam. This compares with the original 196 cases in 1990.<sup>4</sup> These are cases where US information about a missing US serviceman seems to differ from that of the Vietnamese. Vietnam facilitates a US special team that has extensive geographic access to conduct research and investigations on discrepancy cases.



US officials believe Vietnam has, for the most part, been cooperative on these cases. The main difficulty in resolving such cases is in obtaining leads. When we or the Vietnamese obtain such leads, they have acted promptly to help resolve the discrepancy, according to US officials.

**Assistance in Implementing Trilateral Investigations With Laos.**



<sup>4</sup> The original priority discrepancy cases were established by US officials after visits to Vietnam by General Vessey, the US special representative, in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

**POW/MIA Accounting**

The Department of Defense POW and Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) maintains the record of unaccounted for Americans in Vietnam. As of March 1998, 1,565 Americans were so listed. The vast majority of these cases involve individuals who are known to have been killed or were last seen in circumstances in which death was a near certainty:

- Of the 1565, there were 825 confirmed dead at wartime by their commanders and comrades.
- Subsequently, intensive research by US Government officials has established that half the remainder—about 370 people—are dead.
- Only 48 are considered to be priority discrepancy cases—that is, cases involving American personnel who were known to be alive, not gravely wounded, and in proximity to the enemy at the time of their loss.

<sup>a</sup> Source: DPMO



US officials note that the Laotians have become somewhat more cooperative over the last two or three years, perhaps because they are gaining experience with US POW/MIA issues.

Trilateral investigations focus on those areas of Laos that were more or less controlled by Vietnam during the war. The procedures for conducting operations are gradually becoming less cumbersome, such as those for interviewing witnesses and conducting field activities. Joint recovery activities in Laos have been conducted according to geographic priorities, mostly on a North-to-South basis,

[REDACTED]

***Provision of POW/MIA-Related Documents, Personal Artifacts, and Equipment.*** Vietnam has provided over 28,000 documents to US officials, but we believe the Vietnamese probably could improve their record in providing these materials.

[REDACTED]

- Vietnam's archival filing and retrieval system for material 25 to 30 years old may not be adequate to readily produce relevant

[REDACTED]

documents.

[REDACTED]

Nevertheless, Vietnam has become more cooperative than before in providing such materials. In several instances, Vietnam has provided documents that its investigators uncovered unilaterally. When the US side has good leads, the process of obtaining records and artifacts has been eased. For example, in May 1995, Vietnamese authorities gave a US delegation over 200 pages of documents, sketch maps, and witness reports collected by their investigation teams. The documents included a comprehensive review of all special remains cases, including photographs, grave registration lists, and "died in captivity" lists.

***Live-Sighting Reports.*** Live-sighting investigations are a particularly difficult problem. Hanoi is sensitive about allegations it is holding POWs since the releases mandated by the Paris accords in 1973 and expresses doubt that investigations of such reports will yield any results. Hundreds of such reports have been found to be inaccurate during a prescreening process, including many that were received through intelligence channels. Since 1987, US officials have conducted 120 on-site investigations of live-sighting reports. Thus far, none has turned up convincing evidence of live American POWs still in Vietnam. After investigation, many of the reports turned out to be scams. Still others were deemed inaccurate because the investigators could not find the locations or structures cited in the reports. A few have

**Documents** [REDACTED]

*The Vietnamese have turned over a wide array of wartime and postwar documents that have contributed directly to accounting for missing Americans, resolving questions about why remains cannot be recovered, and confirming loss locations for downed aviators. Among the most useful are a collection of contemporary reports, prepared for Vietnam's internal use, that list US casualties, note whether remains were collected and buried, identify grave sites, and indicate whether the central government was able to collect remains. So far US officials have acquired documents of this type for 21 of 26 northern wartime provinces. Of the five provinces for which these officials do not yet have such records, all are in the far north of Vietnam; there are only two in which Americans were lost in any number.*

*For several of these same areas, Vietnam has also provided records prepared by wartime military organizations that detail the locations of downed aircraft. Using data from these "shootdown rosters," US officials have been able to locate previously unknown aircraft crash sites and to send joint teams to investigate on the ground and find out what happened to the aircrews.*

*The documents have also helped determine which US losses were known to Vietnamese forces within a defined geographic area and which were not. Establishing which losses*

*occurred without Vietnamese awareness has enabled US officials to assess the degree to which they should expect assistance from Vietnam in investigating particular cases. In some cases, such evidence has enabled US officials to conclude that certain aircraft crashed at sea or in remote unpopulated areas.*

*The ability to prepare, preserve, and transport documents declined precipitously outside northern Vietnam. In southern Vietnam and in the border areas of Cambodia and Laos, the field conditions in which Communist forces operated and the mobility of their headquarters, which frequently came under attack by US and Allied forces, militated against extensive recordkeeping.*

*The few records acquired from outside northern Vietnam relate chiefly to POWs who died in captivity. One exception is a list of aircraft downed by PAVN forces in southern Laos. This record is a postwar compilation of electronic message traffic from units in this area. The terse entries suggest the focus was identifying units that should be credited with a downing and not where aircraft crashed or what happened to the aircrews.*

*The Vietnamese have permitted US personnel to examine thousands of open-source wartime records, including museum artifacts and receipts, documentary films, news photos, and central and provincial newspapers.*

turned up Americans or Eurasians who were not former POWs.<sup>6</sup> [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

<sup>6</sup> One case, for example, turned out to be a former US serviceman, not a POW, who returned to Vietnam to live with his Vietnamese wife and Amerasian child. [REDACTED]

### **The SRV's Dedication of Resources to the POW/MIA Issue**

Vietnam's primary resource is people, not money. We assess that Vietnam has assigned increasingly qualified people to POW/MIA issues and has given them the authority to act in conjunction with their US counterparts. This assessment is based on the experience of US officials who have longtime experience working with the Vietnamese on the POW/MIA issue. The Vietnamese have become adept at adjusting their support for joint field activities to meet US requirements. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Vietnam's primary interest will continue to be engagement with the United States, and Hanoi will watch carefully for signs that Washington's efforts to achieve full accounting are flagging. Vietnam would adjust its policies accordingly. Vietnam probably would regard a US decision to reduce expenditures for the POW/MIA mission or to reduce field activities as an indicator that US interest was waning. [REDACTED]

### **Were POWs Interrogated by Russians?**

We are uncertain whether Vietnam or Russia have been fully forthcoming on cases of Russian interrogations of POWs. This question is important because no returning POWs, except

**Live-Sighting Investigations** [REDACTED]

*Although 120 live-sighting investigations have been carried out, none has generated any credible evidence of American POWs left in Vietnam. Hanoi protests having to investigate such cases, but reports surface regularly—most recently on five POWs possibly being held in Laos—and established procedures for resolving them continue to work well. For example, the latest live-sighting case in Vietnam was resolved in March 1998.* [REDACTED]

for one CIA civilian employee, reported knowledge of being interrogated by Russians. The Russians may have witnessed the interrogation of some POWs without the POW's knowledge. For example, in interviews with US officials, V. G. Panov (Lt. Col., ret.) said that he, along with other foreign officers (Chinese, Korean, and perhaps European), witnessed the interrogations of American POWs on four separate occasions. Panov also stated, however, that he believed the POWs may have been unaware that he was a Soviet officer. [REDACTED]

The evidence on Russian involvement in interrogations is contradictory. Former KGB General Kalugin said that Russians had questioned US POWs; President Yel'tsin also claimed this had happened.<sup>7</sup> Besides Panov, noted above, other Russian officers interviewed by DPMO's Joint Commission Support Directorate have said they were present during the interrogation of American POWs. [REDACTED]

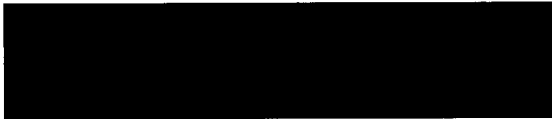
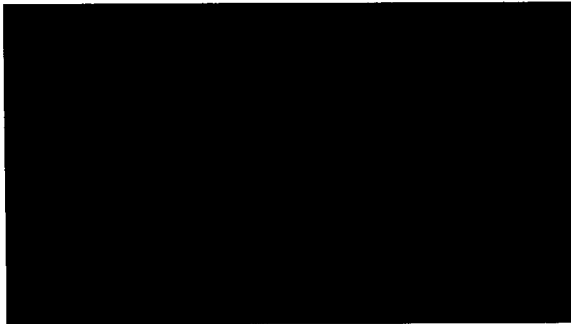
Other Russians, however, have denied such allegations. Those who were in Vietnam during the war have stated that the Vietnamese, sensitive about sovereignty, did not allow the Soviets to be involved in interrogations. Rather, the Soviets would pass to the Vietnamese their questions, and the Vietnamese would occasionally provide information. Panov, for example, stated that he could only witness interrogations of Americans when his questions were being asked. The Russian questions reflected the Soviet preoccupation with technical intelligence. [REDACTED]

Given these competing claims, the reports require continuing investigation. [REDACTED]

**Were Some POWs Transferred to Russia or Elsewhere?**


We have reviewed many reports that claim that POWs were transferred out of Vietnam. None of these reports have been substantiated, and many have proved unreliable.<sup>8</sup> But a few received since 1992 remain under investigation or unresolved. [REDACTED]






We also have credible reports that US POWs were *not* transferred out of Vietnam. General Volkogonov told the US-Russian Commission on POW/MIA Affairs that his delegation had uncovered no evidence that US prisoners had been transported from Vietnam to the USSR. Several of the Russians who served in Vietnam during the war, and would have reason to know, were interviewed by US officials and insisted that no US POWs were transferred to the USSR. For example, K. F. Katushev, former Central Committee Secretary for Maintaining Ties With Other Socialist Countries in the early 1970s, told US interviewers that he would have known if US POWs were transferred to the USSR. He believed no such transfers occurred.



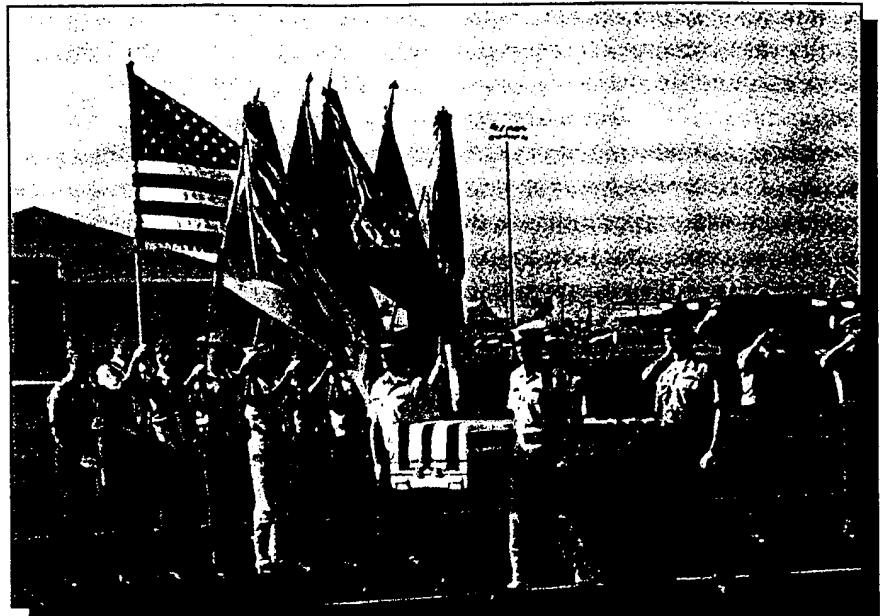
Although we lack good evidence that POWs were transferred to the USSR, we also conclude that the books should remain open on this issue. Until some of the reporting above is clarified, we cannot say definitively that no POWs were transferred from Vietnam. 

### **Improving Accounting**

We have identified above two types of obstacles to MIA accounting: technical and political. Technical obstacles are those related to retrieving archival materials, pursuing leads, and conducting field activities. They also would include such problems as the circumstances under which the loss of a US soldier occurred or changes in geography—for example, the shifting of rivers or changes in fields and forests. They primarily involve logistics. We assess Vietnam is most likely to be cooperative in resolving these obstacles under these conditions:

- Continued US cooperation with Vietnamese authorities in applying the best technology and communications to help recover and identify remains.
- Continued US financial commitment to resolution endeavors. We think that the Vietnamese side measures its own efforts by evaluating the US commitment, in addition to relying on the funding.
- Continued nurturing of Vietnamese professional competence. This will require patient engagement but can also encourage the type of mutual respect at the working level that enhances prospects for successful recovery efforts. 

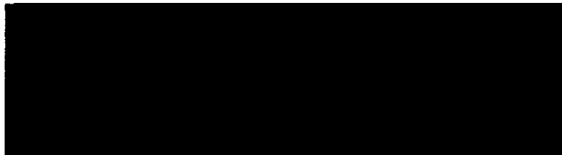
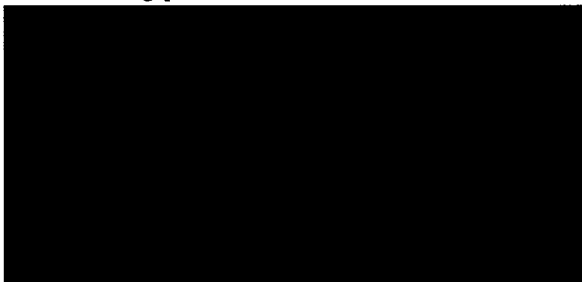




*Figure 3. Having made the ultimate sacrifice, a veteran returns home with full military honors*

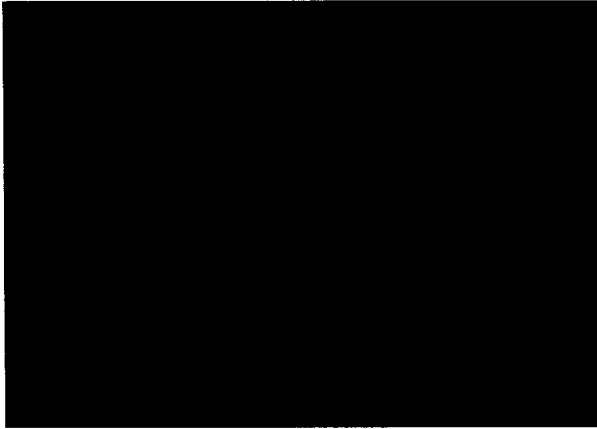
Photo Courtesy CILHI

Political obstacles may be somewhat more difficult to resolve. We think the primary issue will be Vietnamese sensitivity over cooperation with the United States on the POW/MIA issue. The question could become more problematic as local officials question the degree of effort being put toward resolution of US cases



**Overall SRV Performance**

On balance, we conclude that Vietnam's performance on the US POW/MIA issue has definitely improved over the past decade.



things, the lengthy report states that Vietnam was holding 1,205 US POWs in September 1972. The 1,205 figure was 669 more than the highest number the US Government ever believed might be held captive and more than twice as many as the 591 released by Vietnam during Operation Homecoming in 1973. [REDACTED]

*New Information.* Since the original examination of the document by the Intelligence Community in 1993, interviews with Russian officials who were knowledgeable of the document continue to validate the claim that it is an authentic GRU document and not a Russian fabrication:

## Part II: Intelligence Community Assessment of the "1205" and "735" Documents [REDACTED]

### Current Assessment

Although since 1993 we have obtained new information about the two documents above, we believe the assessment released by DOD<sup>9</sup> remains valid: that is, the documents were probably collected by the military intelligence department of the former Soviet Union (GRU) but are not what they purport to be. That report concluded that the documents contain significant inaccuracies and anomalies. Most important, on the basis of US Government records, the numbers of POWs cited in these documents as being held by North Vietnam were much too high. [REDACTED]

### "1205" Document

The 1205 document purports to be a report by General Tran Van Quang to the Vietnamese Politburo in September 1972. The document came to light in 1993. One copy was found by an American researcher in the Russian archives. Another was provided US officials by Presidential Adviser Volkogonov. Among other



- GRU Capt. A. I. Sivets told US interviewers in October 1997 that the original document was destroyed, that the source had provided other Vietnamese documents to the GRU, and that the 1205 document was genuine.
- K. F. Katushev, CPSU Central Committee Secretary responsible for maintaining ties to other socialist countries in the early 1970s, when interviewed by US officials on 1 July

<sup>10</sup> Russian recollections are hazy on whether the "1205" document was originally written in Vietnamese. General Volkogonov, adviser to President Yel'tsin, thought he remembered seeing an original Vietnamese version. In any event, no Vietnamese version of the document has been located. [REDACTED]

<sup>9</sup> The work of the Intelligence Community was the basis for a news release by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs on 24 January 1994, entitled, "Recent Reports on American POWs in Indochina: An Assessment." [REDACTED]

1997, remembered that he had received a copy of the document in early December 1972.

- Y. P. Glazunov, who served in the Soviet Embassy in Hanoi from 1962 to 1965 as a junior diplomat and again from 1974 to 1978, told US interviewers on 7 March 1997 that he had heard of the 1205 document in the early 1970s when he served in the International Department of the Central Committee. [REDACTED]

While supporting the authenticity of the document, none of the Russians claimed that the figure of 1,205 POWs was accurate. General Volkogonov, in statements to the press in 1993, expressed doubt about the reliability of the numbers. Similarly, a TASS correspondent who served in Vietnam during the period, V. Kobchev, stated that the numbers were too high. Several of the Russians interviewed indicated that information about US POWs probably would not have been high on the Soviet agenda, and not much scrutiny would have been given the number:

- One interviewee, V. V. Dukhin, who served as a Political Counselor in Russia's Embassy in Hanoi from 1992 to 1995 said that the former DCM in Hanoi, I. A. Novikov, (now deceased) told him he was aware of the 1205 document when it was acquired. Novikov described the document acquisition as "slipshod and not a very conscientious effort." He further stated that the GRU agent who acquired the document was not reliable. [REDACTED]

In an interview in April 1997, Vietnamese Sr. Col. (ret.) Bui Tin said that he had a close relationship with General Quang, the putative author of the report. He thought it plausible that Quang could have reported to the Politburo and

that the report could have been in Quang's style. Nevertheless, Tin found the document "very strange."<sup>11</sup> [REDACTED]

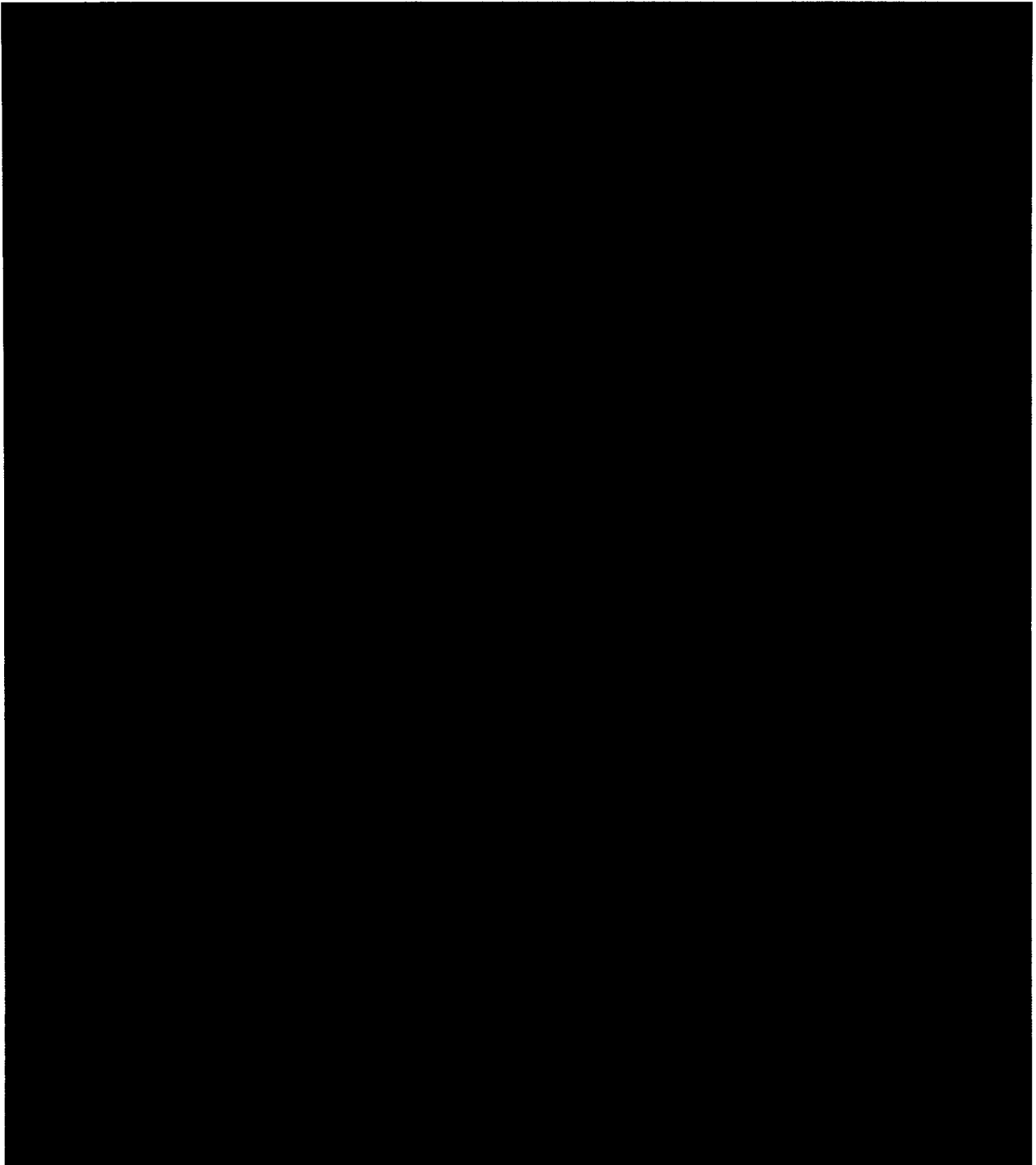
By way of contrast, General Quang, in interviews with US officials consistently denies that he was the source of the report. Vietnamese officials continue to claim the report is a fabrication. [REDACTED]

**Assessment.** None of the new information helps to confirm the accuracy of the 1205 report. As noted in 1993, circumstantial evidence casts doubt on the validity of the report:

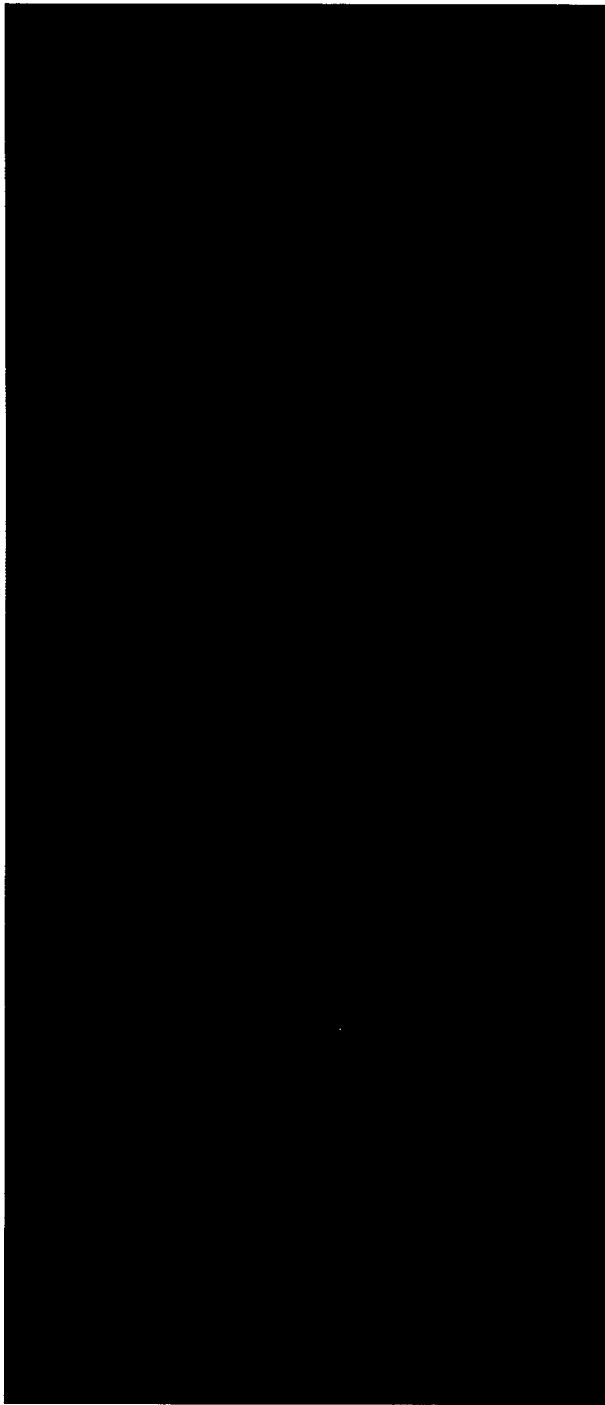
- Quang's responsibilities as a battlefield commander in a combat situation make it unlikely that he would be brought to Hanoi to report on issues that were not within his scope of responsibility [REDACTED]
- The length of the report would be inappropriate for a Politburo meeting. According to an academic specialist on Vietnam, during that particular period the Politburo met weekly and was unlikely to have entertained long reports.
- The purpose of the meetings was to make decisions, not listen to long oral reports.
- The tone of the report also is inappropriate. A person of Quang's subordinate status would not have lectured the Politburo on what its policies were. Such hardcore revolu-

[REDACTED]

~~Secret~~



~~Secret~~



tionaries as Le Duan, Pham Van Dong, and Truong Chinh probably would not have been spoken to in such manner or have tolerated such language.

- The timing of the Politburo meeting is questionable. The report supposedly was given on 15 September 1972, but the Vietnamese claim there was no meeting on that date. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] On that day, Quang Tri fell to South Vietnamese forces and Le Duc Tho, who ranked 5th in seniority on the Politburo, was meeting with Henry Kissinger at a key juncture in the Paris peace talks. Would the Politburo be discussing POW/MIA issues with a general whose forces were defending, and losing, a key city? [REDACTED]

Although the circumstantial evidence above is not definitive, the content of the report casts even more doubt on its accuracy. The portions of the report dealing with the POW issue are inaccurate with respect to how the prisoners were segregated by rank, where they were located, how they were classified, and the conditions of their release. More important, the numbers of POWs the report claims were held are not accurate:

- The 1993 DOD report observed that the 1,205 figure was 669 more POWs than suggested by any reliable source. We have received no new evidence that would alter that assessment.

- If there were additional POWs, we would have known of them unless Vietnam maintained a separate prison system unknown to the POWs who returned in 1973. We have uncovered no reliable evidence that a separate prison system existed for certain POWs; nor do we have such indicators as plausible site locations.
- The 1,205 figure is inconsistent with our understanding of how many Americans survived the events in which they were lost to become captives. Based on information available to US researchers as of 19 January 1994 (when the original analysis of the 1205 and 735 documents was released by DOD), at most, the fates of 73 Americans thought to have been last known alive (on the priority case list) were uncertain. Since then, more US remains have been discovered and returned to the United States from Vietnam. Thus far, the circumstances of these recoveries accord with data and leads obtained by Vietnamese and US authorities. Consequently, the number of Americans whose fates are uncertain (on the priority case list) has been reduced to 48. The recoveries contradict the assertion that Vietnam secretly hid, and perhaps secretly eliminated, hundreds of US POWs. [REDACTED]

Consequently, the Intelligence Community assesses the information in the 1205 document to be unreliable and not a sound foundation for judging Vietnamese performance on the POW/MIA question. [REDACTED]

#### "735" Document

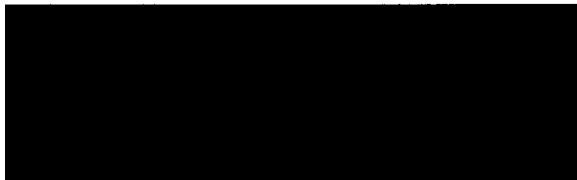
The 735 document purports to be a report to the Central Committee by Hoang Anh (mistranslated Anya), a Central Committee Secretary, in late December 1970 or early January 1971. Like the 1205 document, it was acquired by the

GRU. A paragraph in the report says that Hanoi is holding 735 Americans though it has disclosed only 368 to the United States. It also says these POWs will be returned when US forces withdraw from Vietnam. [REDACTED]

*New Information.* In 1993 we had only two pages of the 735 report; we now have the full text. The Russian sources who claimed the 1205 document was authentic make the same claim for the 735 document. [REDACTED]

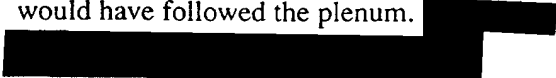
*Assessment.* The new information reinforces the case that this document is an authentic GRU-collected report. Nevertheless, as with the 1205 document, circumstantial evidence suggests the information in the report is inaccurate:

- The dates are wrong. The report says it was given at the 20th plenary session of the Central Committee in late December 1970 or early January 1971. In fact, the 20th plenum was not held until February 1972. The plenum held in January 1971 was the 19th.
- Hoang Anh was indeed a Secretary of the Central Committee at that time and was responsible for agriculture.<sup>12</sup> There is no reason why he would deliver a report that deals extensively with political and military developments and the situations in Laos and Cambodia. Agriculture is mentioned only briefly.




<sup>12</sup> Hoang Anh served in this capacity until his removal in 1974. [REDACTED]




- The report speaks extensively about preparations for the 4th Party Congress, including the establishment of a preparatory committee. In fact, the Politburo did not decide when to hold the 4th Party Congress until July 1975, which was several months after the 24th plenum of the Central Committee. The 4th Party Congress was not held until December 1976.
  - Another key anomaly in the purported report is the charge against 16 “opportunist” members of the Central Committee, six of whom are named. If this were true, they should have been promptly ousted from their positions. Yet the report says the controversy had dragged on for years, and Anh’s call for retribution seems unusually weak. In fact, no action appears to have been taken then, and one alleged “opportunist” remained in his sensitive post, heading the army’s General Political Department, until after the war. Factionalism and disagreement over policy broke out during the period of “collective leadership” after the death of Ho Chi Minh. Some of the dissenting policy positions alleged in the 735 report are plausible. But others—such as a proposal to invite foreign (presumably Chinese) troops to help in Laos and South Vietnam—are not. Furthermore, if opportunism and disunity were of such concern, indirect references in the party press would have followed the plenum.
- 

As in the case of the 1205 document, the circumstantial evidence against the validity of the report is buttressed by the data on the numbers reported:

- The 1993 DOD report concluded that the 735 number was too high. US records indicate that 384 of the 591 POWs released in 1973 were captured before 1971. The total prisoners Hanoi could have been holding at the time could not have exceeded 470 according to US Government records. No evidence has come to light since 1993 that would cause us to revise our judgment.
  - The continued recovery of US remains through the joint field activities since 1993 casts doubt on the likelihood that Vietnam could have been hiding that many unaccounted POW/MIAs.
- 

Consequently, we conclude the 735 document also offers no foundation to support a conclusion that Vietnam has not been forthcoming on POW/MIA issues.



**Annex**

**PAGES 33-42 DENIED**

**Methodology**





**National Security  
Information**

Unauthorized Disclosure  
Subject to Criminal Sanctions

**Information available as of 13 April 1998 was used in  
the preparation of this National Intelligence Estimate.**

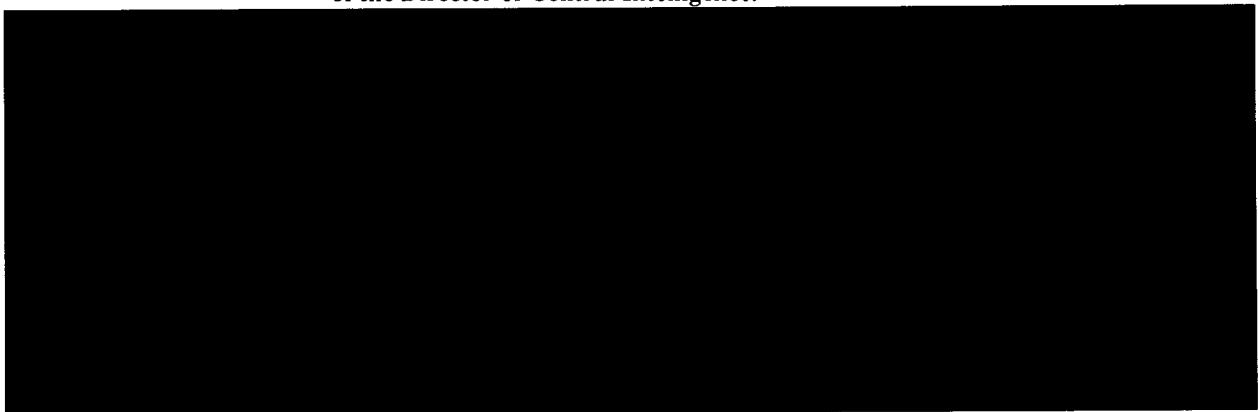
**The following intelligence organizations participated  
in the preparation of this Estimate:**

The Central Intelligence Agency  
The Defense Intelligence Agency  
The National Security Agency  
The Bureau of Intelligence and Research,  
Department of State  
The Federal Bureau of Investigation  
The National Imagery and Mapping Agency

**also participating:**

The Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence,  
Department of the Army  
The Director of Naval Intelligence,  
Department of the Navy  
The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence,  
Department of the Air Force  
The Director of Intelligence,  
Headquarters, Marine Corps

**This Estimate was approved for publication by the  
National Foreign Intelligence Board under the authority  
of the Director of Central Intelligence.**



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