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America's Missing In Action

The Communist government of Vietnam has found an easy way out of dealing with the issue of American POWs still held hostage in Southeast Asia. In retaliation for the U.S. air raid on Libya in mid-April, the Hanoi government has suspended negotiations with the U.S. to resolve the final remaining legacy of the Vietnam War.

"We see that the raid on Libya killed many civilians, so we could not continue with this humanitarian issue," explained Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach. "Libya is our friend. We must have solidarity with our friends."

But for the families of the 2,441 Americans still missing in Southeast Asia, for thousands of Vietnam veterans and for millions of concerned Americans, the issue is not about to go away any time soon. Even the major media have gotten in on the act. During the last week of May ABC's newsmagazine program **20/20** broadcast a special hour-long segment entitled "MIAs: The Story That Will Not Die."

In the Congress, too, the issue remains very much alive. "I am convinced that there are live Americans who remain in Southeast Asia, both against their will and voluntarily," Representative Michael Bilirakis (R-FL) commented in March. "As you know, charges have been made that the government has not done all it can to verify reports of live Americans and secure their release. These are serious charges It's in everyone's best interest to get to the bottom of these charges ... and get on with the task at hand."

Since THE NEW AMERICAN first reported on the problem in its February 24th edition, more evidence has surfaced substantiating the claims of those who insist that American servicemen are, in fact, still being held prisoner in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, evidence continues to build behind charges that the Reagan Administration knows Americans are still held hostage and is doing nothing about it.

The most recent indication that American POWs are still held in Indochina, and that the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and other branches of the U.S. government are suppressing the evidence, came as a result of a visit by a nine-member Congressional delegation to Hanoi in mid-February.

The story of the Ly Nam De Prison incident, as reported in the April issue of **Homecoming II**, a newsletter about living POWs, runs as follows:

A Vietnamese national was interviewed by U.S. government officials in October 1982 about his eyewitness account of live American POWs he said he had seen in Hanoi in August 1982. Looking down into an enclosed courtyard, he saw several Caucasians congregated around a cistern He further provided information which led him to feel certain that these men were American



prisoners. This source was twice polygraphed and both times showed “no deception.”

DIA produced, or had produced, a satellite photo of the compound which clearly showed the courtyard ... but there was no cistern! To further substantiate their own analysis, DIA constructed, or drew ... a “mock-up” of the compound and instead of a cistern, substituted a water tower in a position which they claimed would have precluded the source’s ability to see into the courtyard....

Along comes Robert Garwood and claims that in 1977 he saw an American in this same compound. He drew a map which detailed his recollection of the courtyard, and in that courtyard he drew a cistern!...

Seven Congressmen decided to inspect. They made their way into the compound. Ignoring the shouted warnings, the Congressmen (with Garwood’s map in hand and a camera crew from ABC’s “20/20” in tow) proceeded through the area, between buildings to the interior courtyard. Under the gaze of 100 soldiers who had materialized ... they found the “non-existent” cistern.

Representative Robert Smith (R-NH), one of the seven Congressmen, told the **Manchester Union Leader** that the DIA’s failure to respond to reports of Americans held hostage in Southeast Asia is “deplorable.” He continued: “They are there. I’ve seen the evidence There’s no garbage about deciding whether live Americans are there or not. That’s not the issue. They are there.”

Another member of the delegation, liberal Representative Frank McCloskey (D-IN), commented, “We have moved from an opinion to certainty. We are convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt.”

The issue of Americans still held hostage in Southeast Asia is not going to die. Yet Vietnam veterans and other concerned Americans are growing increasingly frustrated over the intransigence of the U.S. government and its failure to deal forthrightly with the tragedy.

J. Thomas Burch, National Coordinator of the National Vietnam Veterans Coalition, notes: “There is now a widespread perception in the Vietnam veterans’ community that government efforts to resolve the POW-MIA issue consist of ‘all rhetoric, no action.’ In practice, most efforts are devoted to returning remains and few apparent efforts are devoted to returning live prisoners of war.”