



Written by **John M.G. Brown** and research colleague **Thomas V. Ashworth**

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Mikhail Gorbachev, Let Our People Go

John M.G. Brown, a combat infantryman with the 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions in Vietnam, has been investigating the POW/MIA matter for seven years. He is the author of ***Rice Paddy Grunt***, a non-fiction account of the Vietnam War and the anti-war movement at the time of the 1968 Tet Offensive.

Holding American, Allied, and other prisoners as hostages — for ransom or blackmail or for intelligence purposes — has been a Soviet-communist policy since 1919. Hundreds of American civilians and U.S. military hostages of the Intervention held prisoner by the victorious Bolsheviks, along with others arrested or detained later, were used by the Soviets in 1921 to obtain \$100 million worth of desperately needed food supplies under the authority of war relief director (later President) Herbert Hoover. In his memoirs Hoover listed as the first minimum condition for U.S. aid: “freedom of all American prisoners in Russia.”

According to an October 21, 1920 Associated Press report, the total number of American citizens in Russia was estimated at 3000 (including some families of naturalized Americans). Certainly, at this time, hundreds of native-born American civilians and U.S. military prisoners were being held hostage by the Soviets. One of them, a Red Cross official (and U.S. Army officer in WWI) named Emmett Kilpatrick, captured with men of Wrangel’s White Army* smuggled a letter out of a Cheka (secret police) prison: “... I am now held in prison as a hostage for one Jim Larkin [a communist agitator imprisoned in the U.S.] now serving a sentence of twenty years, and the same has been awarded me.”

Western European war prisoners and civilians were also being held hostage by the Soviets at this time, in an effort to gain concessions from their home governments. The U.S. State Department sought to put the matter to rest with a public announcement on October 22, 1920, a day after the above quoted AP story: “Bolshevist figures on the number of Americans in Russia are ‘off’ by about 3000, according to State Department records, which put the correct number at about 35.”

Death Warrant

The State Department claimed that the others were Russian-Americans, and that “all the Americans in Russia remained there of their own free will when Ambassador Francis left that country [July 1918].” Recently uncovered official documents clearly indicate that this 1920 statement served as a death warrant for those American military POWs eventually left behind in Soviet prisons.

Although many reports and live sightings remain classified or hidden, official War Department and FBI-related documents, recently uncovered in the National Archives, indicate that at least 40-50 American prisoners of war — including soldiers of the 339th U.S. Infantry, captured while serving in



the 1918-1919 Intervention forces near Archangel, Russia — remained imprisoned in Soviet gulags for the rest of their lives. Live sightings of American officers and enlisted military POWs in Soviet prisons — such as the Lubianka in Moscow and the Solovetzki Islands GPU forced-labor camps in the White Sea area — continued at least into the 1930s.

Some of the soldiers were identified by name, by an eyewitness who eventually reached the U.S., and some of these names corresponded with those on the 1918-1919 U.S. casualty reports. It is now clear that Lenin's intelligence commissar, Felix Dzerzhinsky, had specifically targeted these men for capture, and had assigned Aleksandr Eiduk as the chief Chekist (later GPU-NKVD) agent for operations against Americans in the Archangel area during 1918-1919. The kidnapping of hostages was a Cheka-Bolshevik trademark.

During the December 1918 founding meeting of the Comintern. Soviet sources record that American, English, and Scottish POWs captured on the Archangel front were used for propaganda purposes. At least partially in retaliation, in 1919-1920 the Allies withheld thousands of Russian POWs on the Western Front.

On August 17, 1921 Lewis S. Gannett wrote that (contrary to State Department claims) at least 15,000 Russian-Americans were in Russia. The actual number of native-born Americans in Russia appears to have been kept secret by the State Department and U.S. Army Intelligence.

Approximately 100 of the Americans — including Emmett Kilpatrick, and a former U.S. Army intelligence officer, Captain W. H. Estes — were eventually released from Russia following the promise of ransom shipments from the U.S. in September 1921, whereupon they revealed horrifying details of mass executions in Soviet prisons. Others, including secretly withheld U.S. Army prisoners of the 1919 "Intervention," never reappeared. By retaining military and civilian prisoners, the Soviets were able to thoroughly analyze their adversaries' armed forces and intelligence services. The Soviets also kidnapped Bavarian war prisoners and demanded the repatriations of Russian prisoners then in Germany.

"You No Longer Exist"

British prisoners were also held hostage by the Soviets, among them a British Embassy official, R.H. Bruce Lockhart. Some, including Lockhart, were eventually exchanged for Soviet officials then held in England, including the later Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov. Some were declared dead, though they were in fact being used by Soviet intelligence. KGB defector Ilya Dzhirkvelov wrote from Britain in 1987 of his work in the secret KGB Archives in the early 1950s. He came across clear evidence that the famous British secret agent of this period, Sidney Reilly, long remained alive in Soviet secret police control after news of his death had been published, and accepted, in Britain. These reports were shown to him to gain his ultimate capitulation. Artuzov, his secret police interrogator, had then told Reilly: "You no longer exist in this world. Your hopes of being freed will come to nothing.... "

This tactic for gaining the cooperation of prisoners was repeatedly used by the NKVD-KGB in succeeding years, and there is every reason to believe that it was also used on the abandoned



U.S. Army prisoners of the 1918-19 Intervention and on those abandoned in each succeeding war involving Americans.

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, Lenin's successor, dictator Josef Stalin, imprisoned ever-increasing numbers of Russian "counterrevolutionaries," Western Europeans, and other foreigners. The great majority of the estimated five million pre-WWII prisoner-slaves who died in the forced labor camps were Russian and Ukrainian peasants and other ethnic minority peoples of the Soviet Union who had resisted collectivization and harsh communist rule.

The growing use of costless state slaves provided the Communist Party elite with a vast source of export and consumer goods requiring no initial capital investment. U.S. media apologists for the communist regime in Moscow, and powerful and influential businessmen who desired to trade with Russia, discounted reports of slave labor. During this same period, Stalin also greatly expanded the Soviet foreign intelligence network inside the western democratic nations. This was to become highly significant during and after WWII.

Following the secret 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact, which divided up Eastern Europe, Germany and Russia both attacked Poland. In the ensuing occupation of eastern Poland, Stalin's NKVD secret police deported two million "anti-communist" Poles to forced-labor camps in Siberia. According to documents in our National Archives, the American OSS and Military Intelligence and their British counterparts carefully studied top-secret intelligence reports of this action, and of the Soviet massacre of 15,000 Polish Army officers at Katyn Forest, to assess Stalin's possible future conduct with military POWs. The Soviet Union had refused to sign the pre-war Geneva accord on the treatment of POWs.

By 1944 British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Winston Churchill, and others (including, to a lesser extent, American government officials) were already worried about the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Allied POWs held by the Germans in the east, who would ultimately be liberated by the Red Army. These concerns increased following the merciless German destruction of the non-communist Polish Home Army in the September 1944 Warsaw Uprising — as the Red Army of "liberation" waited nearby. By this time the British government had decided to adopt a policy of forcible repatriation of all "Soviet citizens," to gain Soviet reciprocation in returning British and Commonwealth prisoners. The American government was to wait until a time of crisis to address the problem.

The United States had been fortunate in successfully evacuating 2200 of the American prisoners in Romania and Bulgaria by air before the takeover by the Red Army in September 1944. They had had crucial local assistance from King Michael of Romania and the Romanian military. This combined OSS-military operation had been run by OSS officer (and later CIA official) Frank Wisner. At the same time, in Moscow, the U.S. Embassy's Military Mission had submitted a future POW repatriation plan to mollify the Soviets. The Allies left behind stay-in-place agents of the OSS and the British Special Operations Executive in Romania to monitor the Soviet takeover, thereby angering the Soviets, who eventually ordered them to leave. The Soviets wanted no witnesses to their merciless methods of establishing total communist control in occupied areas. Allied actions in



Romania may have influenced later Soviet conduct in Poland, while also giving Stalin a better chance to seize U.S. and British POWs as hostages.

The exchange of prisoners and displaced persons (DPs), between the Soviets and their allies, had already begun prior to the signing of the Yalta Agreement in February 1945 by an ill and exhausted President Roosevelt, but it was at the Crimea Conference that the repatriations of POWs were formalized. Roosevelt's advisors on the scene included Harry Hopkins, General George Marshall, Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, Averell Harriman, Charles Bohlen, H. Freeman Matthews, and Alger Hiss. The fact that the Soviets were secretive in all their actions, and that the repatriations would be under the control of Lavrenti Beria's NKVD, increased fears that Stalin might renege on his promise to return all Allied prisoners. Roosevelt nevertheless signed the prisoner repatriation agreement.

The veteran diplomat Undersecretary of State Joseph Grew (acting-Secretary in Washington) appears to have been the only senior U.S. official to protest strongly the terms of the POW repatriation agreement, in a series of urgent cables from Washington. The American military officers who agreed to the specific Soviet POW repatriation proposals — including General George C. Marshall and Major General John Deane (Chief of the U.S. Military Mission in Moscow under Averell Harriman) — seemed to have no memory of the successful Soviet blackmail with American prisoners from 1919-21. Nor did the civilian officials at Yalta who formalized the provisions within the Agreement.

Soviet Blackmail

In 1945 the Soviet Army "liberated" over a million Western Allied POWs and displaced persons from Nazi camps in Poland, eastern Germany, and Austria. According to the Yalta Agreements they were to be repatriated to their native lands. While some were relatively well-treated and eventually released by the regular Red Army, others suffered a dreadful fate. In a bold and vicious challenge to the Allies who had helped Stalin and his clique survive, over half a million of these prisoners were held as hostages by Soviet authorities and shipped to forced-labor camps. They were sent east by Stalin to rebuild the war-torn production of the USSR.

The prisoners included hundreds of thousands of French, Belgian, Dutch, and other foreign nationals, including ethnic Jews who had survived the Nazi concentration camps. Among them were tens of thousands of American, British, and Commonwealth POWs, whose kidnapping became a high-level national security secret. American and British prisoners were also among the more than 4,500,000 German/Axis and Japanese POWs retained as slave labor by the Soviets. After a massive death toll of gulag prisoners during the winter of 1945-46, the surviving American and British POWs appear to have been largely separated from other prisoners.

Recently declassified U.S. and British documents record details of what is officially described as a Soviet "blackmail" operation, executed by Stalin and his cohorts Molotov, Beria, Golikov, and others. The actual operation was run by Lavrenti Beria's NKVD (forerunner of the KGB), and SMERSH counterintelligence, with (possibly reluctant) assistance from the Red Army. Their object



was to obtain U.S. and British diplomatic recognition of communist regimes in Poland and elsewhere in eastern Europe; and Allied compliance in the coerced and forcible mass-repatriations of more than 5,000,000 Russians, Ukrainians, Cossacks, Poles, Baits, Yugoslavs, Czechs, Hungarians, Romanians, and other East Europeans then in Allied control. These were to include some 2,200,000 "Soviet citizens" then in Allied control. By mid-June 1945, the pre-Yalta fears had become reality, and the American and British people were told that all their prisoners were repatriated or accounted for, when in fact, according to recently declassified official documents, an estimated 20,000 American and 20,000-30,000 British missing POWs were still inside the Soviet-controlled zone.

In Poland and East Prussia the Germans forced hundreds of thousands of Allied POWs and civilians to retreat westward with them, but many were left behind and taken by the Red Army. In violation of the Yalta Agreements, the Soviets attempted to hide their possession of many thousands of the American, British, and Commonwealth POWs, refusing Allied contact officers access to the camps and areas in Poland where they were held.

U.S. Ambassador to Moscow Averell Harriman, Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, Presidential advisor Charles Bohlen, and other American officials reported Stalin's use of kidnapped American POWs to force American diplomatic recognition of the communist-supported regime in Poland. Harriman informed President Roosevelt of the 5000 U.S. POWs, reported in secret cables by U.S. Military Intelligence to be under Soviet control in Poland, in mid-March 1945: "I feel that the Soviet government is trying to use our liberated prisoners of war as a club to induce us to give added prestige to the provisional Polish government by dealing with it in this regard."

Twice, at Harriman's urging, the American President personally requested of Stalin that the Americans be released, that American aircraft be allowed to enter Poland to evacuate the wounded and the sick, and that U.S. contact officers be given access to U.S. prisoner concentrations, as agreed at Yalta. Stalin twice refused, claiming that all U.S. prisoners had been evacuated to Odessa, accusing the United States of abusing and "beating" Soviet prisoners in the West, and insisting that on March 22nd, 1945 "there were on the territory of Poland, only 17 sick Americans."

The Soviets had already demonstrated, on March 18, 1945, just how violently they would react to attempted violations of their airspace by American or British aircraft. On that day a Soviet fighter airwing had attacked a large force of heavy American bombers above the Soviet bridgehead over the Oder River, near the Polish-German border. Whether or not the bombers were bound for a secret POW rescue mission inside Poland is still classified, but they suffered no losses in the ensuing aerial battle — during which six Soviet fighters were shot down. The incident was hushed up, but aerial combats between the Soviets and the Americans and the British continued along the front.

During the April 1945 founding UN Conference in San Francisco, British Foreign Office officials reported to Churchill's Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden on identical NKVD action with British and Commonwealth prisoners in Soviet hands: "...The Russians deny the existence of any British



prisoners of war in Poland but we have evidence there are prisoners concentrated at Cracow and Czestochowa This is a clear breach of the Yalta Agreement There is I am sure great opposition to allowing our people to have access to Poland and some inclination to blackmail us into dealing with the Warsaw authorities “

The Soviets actually transferred several hundred of the Americans to the control of the communist-supported Polish government to strengthen the ongoing demand for diplomatic recognition. Although 2858 Americans and 4400 British were eventually repatriated from Poland through Odessa, according to recently declassified government documents, 2000 or more Americans and several thousand British and Commonwealth prisoners disappeared in Poland during this first phase of the NKVD kidnapping operations.

The Soviets kept hundreds more Americans in and around Odessa, according to declassified documents and the testimony of one of the last British prisoners to escape, Alec Masterton, formerly of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, now of Vancouver, British Columbia. On October 29, 1989 in a front-page **Toronto Star** article, Masterton stated that he knew of American bomber crews in Odessa who never returned. He also stated that upon his return he was sworn — by MI-6, Britain’s foreign intelligence agency, and a British Army Captain — never to tell, “on my honor as a British soldier.”

Sacrifice to the UN

The secret POW crisis had already reached the boiling point with several Soviet attacks on American reconnaissance aircraft. High-level U.S. policymakers made a cold-blooded calculation of the military and political consequences of open conflict with the Soviets over the POWs who had disappeared in Poland and Odessa. The final decisions were made, first by President Roosevelt and then by Truman, to avoid a 1945 military confrontation with Stalin over the thousands of American, British, and Commonwealth POWs under Soviet control. Aside from the potential military losses, Soviet participation in the United Nations and entrance into the Japanese war were seen as more important than possible recovery of the POWs. Roosevelt made the policy decision two weeks before his death, cabling Harriman: “... It does not appear appropriate for me to send another message now to Stalin You should make such approaches to ensure the best possible treatment of Americans who are liberated.”

General George Marshall issued the secret orders implementing the policy decision: “... Revised policy liberated prisoners ... censor all stories ... delete criticism Russian treatment “

In the last two weeks of his life Roosevelt stuck to his decision. From this point on, Stalin knew that the American leadership would back down. Nearly a month later, as the European war drew to a close, a new President, Harry Truman, was briefed by Averell Harriman on the POW kidnapping by the Soviets in Poland. Truman, however, also decided that the potential losses, both diplomatic and military, of open conflict with the Soviet Union were not worth the recovery of all U.S. prisoners in Soviet control. He too considered the United Nations and the Japanese war top priorities and endorsed Roosevelt’s decision.



On April 20, 1945, the day of Truman's first consultation with Harriman upon the ambassador's return from Moscow, Marshall again issued the order forbidding the use of military force to recover American POWs: "Top secret for McNarney CMA information Eisenhower Policy is that no repeat no retaliatory action will be taken by U.S. forces at this time for Soviet refusal to meet our desires with regard to American contact teams and aid for American personnel liberated by Russian forces."

From the U.S. Moscow Embassy Chargé d'Affaires George Kennan (later to achieve fame as "X," author of the **Foreign Affairs** article in which the "Containment Doctrine" was first enunciated) cabled Secretary of State Edward Stettinius on April 30th: "Golikov makes startling allegations regarding mistreatment of Soviet citizens in British and American prisoner of war camps He alleges that all British and American prisoners have been repatriated except for small groups and complains of delays in repatriation of liberated Russian prisoners of war."

As the Soviet Army had advanced into Germany and Austria, tens of thousands more Allied prisoners had, in fact, fallen into their hands. On VE Day Lend-Lease aid to the USSR was suddenly and drastically curtailed, as had been secretly urged by Harriman in mid-March. This infuriated Stalin, who had already demanded \$6 billion in American postwar reconstruction aid. On May 11, 1945, with the European war now ended, General Eisenhower cabled Harriman's military chief, General John Deane, in Moscow: "... Information received from prisoner of war camps in rear of Russian lines indicates thousands of United States and British prisoners of war held in close confinement Please express to Russians the urgency of this matter "

A report published by American columnist Drew Pearson in May 1945, alleging the existence of secret U.S. contingency plans for war with the Soviet Union, and treated with both derision and rage by U.S. officials, now appears to have been based on fact. Truman, however, stuck to his decision against the use of American force.

Bargaining Chips

On May 23, 1945, two weeks after the end of the war in Europe, Eisenhower's chief POW negotiator with the Soviets, Major General Ray W. Barker, stated in a secret report: "The SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces] representatives came to the firm conviction that British and American prisoners of war were, in effect, being held as hostages by the Russians I am of the opinion that we may find a reluctance to return them all ... since these men constitute a valuable bargaining point "

Truck convoys attempting to reach U.S. prisoners in the Soviet zone of Germany were fired on and driven back empty, and U.S. and British reconnaissance aircraft were attacked and shot down by the Soviets. Freight trains sent into the Soviet zone loaded with relief supplies disappeared, along with their entire crews and American military guards. Some U.S. and British prisoners escaped by "exfiltrating" the Soviet lines, but thousands of prisoners in Germany were retained by the Soviets and disappeared. Some were tried and convicted of espionage after Soviet officials refused to accept GI dog tags as proof of identity, in lieu of passports. Allied prisoners who succeeded in



escaping have reported that the Soviets shot POWs who tried to reach American or British lines.

In Austria, the Supreme Allied Commander-Mediterranean (SAC-MED) Field Marshal Harold Alexander was facing a new Soviet POW blackmail threat. The Soviets were demanding Allied recognition of their puppet regime in Vienna, refusing entrance to POW contact officers, and demanding forced repatriation of anti-communist Cossacks and other “Soviet citizens.” On May 22, 1945 Alexander cabled London: “Difficulty in tracing BR/US PWs in Russian zone.” He reported U.S. and British POWs being shipped east into Russia “in boxcars with German PWs.” On May 26th, he added: “Agreement with Russians at Graz only applies to handing over Soviet citizens in British zone Austria no repeat no reciprocal guarantees in respect of British PWs obtained except half-hearted promises which have so far not been honored ”

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of other Allied prisoners were disappearing into Russia. French General Cherriere reported to SHAEF on May 30, 1945, nearly a month after the European war was over: “... According to confirmed reports, Russians still do not release thousands of French ex-POWs and civilians, forcing them to work. Many transferred eastwards to unknown destination. Please inform high authority.”

The Soviets were now denying the existence of over one million French, Belgian, Dutch, and other Allied POWs and civilian political deportees, known to be alive in the Soviet zone. On May 31, 1945 a secret message to Harriman’s assistant in Moscow, General Deane, admitted the disappearance of over a million Western Europeans in the Soviet zone and added: “This discrepancy of over a million Western Europeans is causing the Dutch and French governments considerable anxiety. Can the Soviets clarify situation...?”

The Soviets stonewalled for years on the return Of these prisoners, and half a million of them disappeared into Stalin’s gulags. Many probably died at forced-labor on starvation rations during the first few postwar winters. A secret June 1945 report by Donald Heath, Deputy to U.S. Political Advisor Robert Murphy, illustrated the process of disappearance: “... Although General Golubev would not agree to first priority delivery of US and UK ex-prisoners of war, he gave his most solemn personal assurances that all US and UK ex-prisoners would in fact be given preferential treatment. A request for second priority for Western European ex-political deportees ... was countered by the fiat assertion that all political prisoners held in German concentration camps had been released and that there were, accordingly, no more political prisoners in Soviet-occupied territory. With respect to this category of displaced persons, not even verbal assurances were to be had.”

State Secrets

The disappearance of half a million Allied prisoners became a state secret of France, Belgium, and Holland, as it was in the United States and Britain, and high-level knowledge of this secret formed part of the original binding glue of the NATO Alliance. Of those who knew, and were later to achieve prominence, François Mitterand, the future Socialist president of France, was among the first to publish, in 1945, a protest of the mass kidnapping.



General George Patton's 3rd Army located thousands more American and British prisoners being held by the Soviets in eastern Austria. Confronted by Patton's Chief of Staff, General Hobart Gay, at Linz, Austria, Soviet General Derevenko admitted holding them. To Soviet demands in Austria were added Tito's demands — that he be allowed to occupy Trieste and that hundreds of thousands of anti-communist "Yugoslav citizens" be forcibly repatriated. Patton's 3rd Army was used in a threatening demonstration against Yugoslav and Soviet back-up forces in Austria, but there is no evidence that the majority of the Allied prisoners held by the Soviets in Austria (or in Yugoslavia) were ever returned.

U.S. and British intelligence reports and cables from General Marshall spoke of more than 15,000 Americans and some 8500 British and Commonwealth prisoners in Soviet-occupied Austria alone. While the Soviets temporarily admitted their existence, they refused U.S. and British contact officers entrance into the camps holding these men, just as they had previously done in Poland and Germany. Later the Soviets reduced the number admitted to 5500 and then denied holding these POWs altogether. The crisis was kept secret from the American and British people, who were told on May 31, 1945 by Undersecretary of War Robert Patterson that substantially all their prisoners had been returned. Yet a classified SHAEF memo of the day before states that an estimated 20,000 Americans and 20,000 British remained in Soviet hands.

Affirmed by Truman, Roosevelt's policy decision — to avoid military confrontation with Stalin over some 20,000 kidnapped American POWs — was allowed to stand. Coerced and forcible repatriation of all "Soviet citizens" was seen as the only possible way to recover our men. Implementation of this policy was delegated to the departments and agencies. It appears that Field Marshal Alexander, General George Patton, and, to a lesser extent, others (including General Eisenhower) resisted the chain of events prior to and following the unsuccessful September 1945 Foreign Ministers meetings. The British forcibly repatriated, from Austria to almost certain death, some 50,000 anti-communist Cossacks and many more Yugoslav Croats and other minorities — in the hope of ransoming their own men from the Soviets. According to former British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan, only 2000 British were received in return.

The forced repatriations were accomplished only after mass suicides, shootings, and other violence. Patton had meanwhile been ordered back to the U.S. (where he remained until the crisis was secretly contained, in July 1945). Upon his return to Europe, he continued, until his death following a truck-car collision in December 1945, to urge confrontation with the Soviets. It is interesting to note that one of the major reporters whose biased charges led to the removal of General George Patton as Commander of the 3rd Army and as Military Governor of Bavaria was Carl Levin of the **New York Herald Tribune**. Levin also wrote a widely quoted, major story on June 5, 1945 under the heading: "25,000 US Prisoners Turn Up Alive." In what appears to be the primary cover-up story concocted by the U.S. command, Levin quoted U.S. Lt. Col. W.P. Schweitzer concluding "that it was unlikely that any others would be found, except *stragglers* who may come in from Russian-occupied Germany." Levin's article helped seal the fate of American POWs in Soviet hands. Other U.S. officers were not permitted to tell the truth.



Stalin Reneges

POWs and repatriations were a secret topic of the 1945 founding UN Conference in San Francisco, the 1945 Hopkins-Stalin meetings, and the Potsdam Conference, though “Poland” was the topic most often cited to the public. Allied leaders continued to confront the Soviets with evidence that large numbers of Western POWs were in their control, which the Soviets denied. In an apparent appeasement attempt, the U.S. and British forces pulled back from the Soviet zones at the beginning of July 1945, leaving behind hundreds of thousands of Soviet ex-prisoners. Simultaneously, the U.S. extended formal diplomatic recognition of the communist-supported government in Poland on July 5, 1945, just prior to the Potsdam Conference.

Eisenhower made at least one last personal, roundabout, and unsuccessful effort to secure permission from Marshall Zhukov to obtain entrance for American contact officers in mid-August 1945. At this same time, General Edwin Sibert, Eisenhower’s Chief of Intelligence for the Communications Zone (later Deputy Director of the CIA), had begun developing Nazi east-front intelligence expert Rheinhard Gehlen. Gehlen’s organization, which included a stay-behind network inside Soviet-occupied territory, later worked for U.S. Military Intelligence and the CIA and became the foundation of the West German Intelligence. Gehlen’s debriefings of German ex-POWs returning from the Soviet gulags formed the basis for his intelligence estimates and provided many (still classified) live sightings of Americans held in the USSR.

Evidence has surfaced of secret returns of small numbers of Allied prisoners in exchange for the forcibly-repatriated Soviet citizens of whom Solzhenitsyn, Lord Bethell, and Nikolai Tolstoy have written so eloquently. Stalin reneged on full reciprocation, and most of the Allied POWs disappeared into secret, special camps.

Official documents state that 199,500 British and Commonwealth prisoners — including Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, and South Africans — had been held by the Germans up to mid-March 1945, yet only 168,746 were eventually repatriated. The total of U.S. prisoners in German hands in early 1945 was known to be at least 105,000, but was probably as many as 120,000, including POWs who were still carried as MIAs. Of these, 91,252 had been officially reported repatriated by early 1946. By retaining such numbers of prisoners, the Soviets gained the additional benefit of the labor of thousands of technologically-advanced (by Soviet standards) Allied prisoners. Others were no doubt made use of by NKVD/KGB and military intelligence, and in training KGB and GRU deep-penetration agents and spies.

Riddled With Spies

The actions of highly placed Soviet moles and spies in the 1945 British and American governments severely compromised the Allies, and greatly assisted the Soviets in this operation. H.R. “Kim” Philby was, at the time of the 1945 POW crisis, chief of all Soviet counterintelligence for the British Secret Intelligence Service, MI-6. He also was to cultivate relationships with American Intelligence officers of the OSS such as Allen Dulles, James Angleton, and Frank Wisner, who later became senior CIA officials.



Donald Maclean was First Secretary of the British Embassy in Washington under Lord Halifax, with access to all high-level plans and secret documents on POWs. British Ambassador to Moscow Archibald Clark-Kerr maintained long, close relationships with (subsequently exposed) Soviet spies such as Guy Burgess, Stig Wennestrom, Richard Sorge, and Gunther Stein. He had long been known to his colleagues as a supporter and admirer of the Soviet system and Stalin. Documentary evidence now indicates that in mid-March 1945, when Harriman was urging direct Presidential action with Stalin over allied POWs in Poland, Clark-Kerr was belittling their numbers and urging Churchill not to confront Stalin, for the sake of Allied unity.

Harry Hopkins, an intimate advisor to Roosevelt and negotiator for Truman, was an admirer of Stalin who consistently acted as a Soviet agent-of-influence. His secret late-May/early-June 1945 meetings with Stalin in Moscow, while U.S. POWs were disappearing in Austria and Germany, may have been decisive to the outcome of the POW blackmail operation. Hopkins was “bubbling with enthusiasm about his meetings with Stalin,” recalled then U.S. Political Advisor Robert Murphy, who also remembered that Hopkins had “changed our perspective at SHAEF.” Hopkins told Murphy (and Eisenhower): “We can do business with Stalin! He will cooperate!” Alger Hiss was also an advisor to Roosevelt at Yalta, where the repatriation of prisoners was settled, and subsequently had access to most critical and secret U.S. documents and strategies during the POW kidnapping crisis.

According to the later BRIDE-VENONA decryptions of secret 1945 Soviet NKVD radio traffic, additional Soviet spies and agents-of-influence existed in the American White House, the OSS, the Pentagon, and the State Department — and in Britain’s Foreign Office, its signals intelligence, and MI-5 — giving the Soviets precise information on every American and British move and countermove, before they were made. One top Soviet spy was identified in the VENONA intercepts as having flown back from Moscow to the United States with Harriman in his private aircraft. (Hiss has been mentioned as the candidate, but Harry Hopkins and Charles Bohlen also traveled with Harriman on occasion.)

Stalin’s failure to reciprocate in the repatriations of 1945-47 resulted in an official tendency to minimize the extent of Allied POW losses. In classified U.S. and British documents, the totals of prisoners known to be in Soviet hands were scaled down to 5500 Americans and 8500 British and Commonwealth prisoners. Continuing research indicates that these figures reflect a shifting of missing, known prisoners into other categories. According to the 1953 Senate testimony of Charles Bohlen, advisor and translator for Roosevelt and Truman, some 60,000 Americans may have come under Soviet control, of whom only 28,662 were repatriated. Facing tough confirmation hearings, Bohlen may have been threatening possible consequences for his defeat. After this revelation, Bohlen’s nomination as Ambassador to the USSR was swiftly approved. Some 78,000 Americans remain missing-in-action from World War II.

The military was ordered to implement what was in fact a decision made by the supreme civilian authority. Top-secret lists of known U.S. prisoners in Soviet hands were classified and buried in the Pentagon by direction of General (later Secretary of State) George Marshall. (Former U.S. Army Major Carl Heinmiller, of Haines, Alaska, who served under General Marshall in the Pentagon in



1945-46, stated during interviews with this writer in 1987 and 1989 that in early 1946 he handled classified U.S. documents listing figures, by prison camp numbers, totaling thousands of Americans remaining in Soviet captivity at that time. He had long remained silent for security reasons.)

“Show of Force”

The acute need for intelligence inside Soviet territory — among other things, to locate these hundreds of thousands of missing Allied prisoners for possible secret rescues or negotiations — led to covert U.S.-Soviet air battles in Europe and U.S. naval threats to the Soviets at Dairen and Port Arthur, in Manchuria. The temporary halting of forced repatriations in September 1945 may have been related to an unfulfilled American expectation that U.S. prisoners shipped to Siberia with the Germans would be returned at the same time that Japanese-held Americans in Manchuria were repatriated by the Soviets. Instead, American OSS teams searching for U.S. POWs in August and September 1945 met with hostile and sometimes violent reactions from the Soviets and the communist Chinese. On August 29, 1945 the Soviets shot down a U.S. B-29 bomber on a POW rescue mission over Korea.

After the last POWs handed over by the Soviets in Manchuria had sailed, U.S. forces made several military demonstrations of power to the Soviet forces in Manchuria. U.S. carrier aircraft made a “show of force” over the harbor at Dairen. Later, U.S. cruisers and destroyers of the 7th Fleet made another “show of force.” The order for a U.S. military threat to the Soviets came from such a high level that senior U.S. officers at the scene were not informed of the reasons for it. In declassified U.S. documents, U.S. Army Colonel James Donovan, in charge of a POW repatriation team on the scene, reported:

This worried Admiral Settle considerably Some Russian officers came to see him after the cruisers and destroyers had departed I do not know if they were lodging a protest against the second naval demonstration The admiral was at a loss for a reasonable explanation. His information from (7th) fleet headquarters stated that a show of force would be repeated off Port Arthur The admiral had told me that a “show of force” is technically rather a belligerent action.

Secret reports continued to reach Averell Harriman, George Kennan, and General Deane at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, during September 1945 and thereafter, of American prisoners in NKVD captivity being subjected to torture to extract “espionage” confessions. In September 1945 General Eisenhower tried briefly to stop future forced-repatriations at a time when approximately 26,000 “Soviet citizens” were still in American custody (a number interestingly close to the estimated number of Americans withheld by the Soviets). Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy and Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson were among those who concurred in the necessity for continuing, in 1946, the forcible return of “Soviet citizens.”

By the end of October 1945, the British government was also expressing public dissatisfaction with the lack of Soviet reciprocation in the repatriations of British POWs. On October 31, 1945 Great Britain asserted that the Soviet Union was barring British POW teams from entering Soviet-



occupied territory to search for the thousands of missing British and Dominion POWs. Evidently, at some point following the final 1945 returns of Americans and British from Soviet territory (and the failure of the London Council of Foreign Ministers meeting attended by Molotov, Byrnes, and Bevin), a high-level decision was made to maintain the secrecy surrounding the Soviet retention of POWs, while continuing to push for Soviet reciprocation

Forced repatriations in 1946 were far smaller in scale than the mass movements of the summer of 1945. In the old Nazi concentration camp of Dachau, 135 out of 271 Russians were repatriated in a violent incident that left 11 of them dead of suicide, and 21 severely injured in suicide attempts. Although the secret was beginning to reach the public (Pope Pius XII protested the forced repatriations in an allocution of February 20, 1946), the operations continued. Of some 3000 Russians concentrated at Plattling, 1590 were forcibly returned to the Russians on February 24, 1946, in another violent operation in which five men killed themselves rather than face the NKVD, and many others attempted suicide. On May 13th, 222 more Russians from the Plattling camp were returned, and one more man succeeded in committing suicide despite the most elaborate precautions. The Soviets insisted on receiving the dead bodies of suicides during the repatriations.

How many secretly-returned American POWs were exchanged for these unfortunates is still highly classified. However, the exchange rates between Americans and Russians in 1945 had often been 10, 20, or many more Russians, for each American or British prisoner. (The author has interviewed a former intelligence agent who in 1946 was a member of a team which guided out small groups of Americans and British who had been held by the Soviets and were being secretly returned from rendezvous points inside Soviet-held territory. Cover stories were apparently used for at least some of these missions.)

Yet, at the very time of the last major forced repatriations in early 1946, the Soviets were still shipping American and British POWs east into the USSR. Following publication by the **Toronto Star** of essential details of the previously published article, "A Secret That Shames Humanity" (John M.G. Brown and Thomas V. Ashworth in **U.S. Veteran News and Report**), a Downsview, Ontario resident confirmed this fact. During the January-February period of 1946 Ben Kovacs was an 18-year-old in Novi Mesto, Hungary, about 22 miles from the Soviet border. He remembered seeing Allied POWs being shipped into the Soviet Union at this time. He remembered passing within 15 meters of the train that was under Soviet military guard: "There were about 25 railway wagons filled with troops ... I knew they were speaking. English."

Kovacs is certain that the Allied POWs were heading into the Soviet Union. While the usual load for a boxcar was 40 men, indicating that this shipment was at least 1000 POWs, in reality the Soviet NKVD/KGB secret police were notorious for packing far more men into a "Stolypin" or boxcar than the standard number. These POWs were very likely from among the thousands withheld by Marshal Tolbukhin's Third Ukrainian Front Army in Austria and Hungary during June 1945, on Stalin's orders. The relatively small numbers of Russian forced-repatriates from Plattling apparently prompted Stalin to keep several thousand American prisoners who had been slated for secret trades.



Allied personnel who took part in the forced-repatriations remember not trusting the Soviets to reciprocate. One individual who was at Dachau, involved with POW and DP recovery teams, remembers with despair a particular train shipment from Germany of German prisoners, including a large number of crying children, on their way to Soviet labor camps. It is uncertain whether or not German prisoners were traded with the Soviets for secretly returned Americans. Some 180,000 Germans were returned to the Soviet zone by the American command. Many were immediately arrested by NKVD or puppet secret police and disappeared.

Covert Actions

The secret POW crisis led to the first major American covert actions inside Soviet territory, executed by the OSS, Army G-2/SSU, the State Department's Office of Policy Coordination, and later the CIA — using, among other assets, existing German intelligence networks under Nazi General Reinhard Gehlen, and others within ethnic Soviet republics. As late as December 10, 1945 the War Department had refused official permission to Gehlen's controller, General Sibert, for initiating covert activity against the Soviets. In light of the February 1946 date of the final large-scale repatriation of 1590 Russians from Plattling, it may be significant that such official approval was not forth-coming until March 1946, although it is certain that intelligence activities had been underway unofficially for some time.

This same date also seems pertinent to the final reduction of (secret) numbers of U.S. POWs in Soviet captivity to 5414. The further shipment of U.S./British POWs east into the USSR in boxcars indicated a Soviet decision not to fully reciprocate in the Plattling repatriations. This decision coincided with Stalin's warning to the Soviet people of a coming confrontation with the U.S. and Britain, Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech in Fulton, Missouri, and a toughening attitude towards the Soviet Union on the part of the Truman Administration. U.S. State Department documents from late 1946 and 1947 also indicate suspicion that American POWs held in Yugoslavia and the Balkans were possibly being transferred to the Soviet Union (just prior to Tito's "break" with Stalin).

The forced repatriations culminated in the tragic Operations "Keelhaul" and "Eastwind," in May 1947, more than a year after Churchill's warning in Missouri. In this affair 255 wretched "Soviet citizens" were forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union. Following this last appeasement attempt with Stalin, the Cold War nearly erupted into open war over events in Poland, Yugoslavia, and Berlin. The chain of events eventually led to the Korean War, which in turn resulted in the disappearance of thousands more American and Allied prisoners into communist captivity, some of whom were transferred to Stalin's gulags.

Anti-Soviet intelligence activities resulted in the shipment to America, Britain, and Canada of a number of war criminals of the former Nazi regime, but also produced large numbers of live sightings of American POWs in Stalin's gulags. These have largely remained classified for "national security" reasons, however, possibly to avoid a potentially dangerous public reaction. A few live sightings have been recovered from the National Archives. One example, dated December 1945, was from a Polish ex-prisoner who escaped, from the Soviets, to the West. He reported being held



in a camp east of Tambov with 20,000 others at forced labor, including Americans, British, French, and Belgians: "...when informant left the camp ... some Englishmen ... and several score Americans ... the presence of whom is probably unknown to the British and USA authorities ... asked him urgently (as did the French officers and men) to notify the Allied authorities of their plight."

In an August 1946 report about a repatriated Alsatian soldier, a Deputy of the French National Assembly informed the American Embassy in Paris that "American, British, Belgian, Luxembourg, and other prisoners remained imprisoned in Camp 199-6 at Inskaya, near Novosibirsk." Many live sightings of American POWs in the USSR were reported by German prisoners ransomed from the Soviets before and during the Adenauer era. Most of these are still classified for "national security" reasons. Some of the Japanese who were fortunate enough to return from Siberia had also been imprisoned with American POWs. A November 1950 U.S. Foreign Service report concerned a June 1948 live sighting of Americans by Japanese POWs from Manchuria: "... At 99-13 PW camp in Karanganda ... 25-26 years of age, 5'6" tall, weight 110 pounds, blond hair, blue eyes, lean face, the American was an 'ex-GI' who was captured in Europe near a large river (possibly the Elbe) after being lost from his unit in the last war. He was reportedly tried at Moscow and Karanganda by a military court on charges of espionage and received a 15 year sentence "

A similar live sighting of October 1949 in Karanganda, Kazakh SSR, gave evidence of the treatment accorded American POWs by the Soviet secret police in the camps: "... on his way to work with his group ... he saw Soviet militia and MVD (KGB) soldiers start beating a man who had been walking in the area. The man cried out that he would not stand for that sort of treatment and that he was an American citizen. Then they beat him all the more and called him a spy. A car of the MVD police arrived ... the man was dragged into it and taken to MVD headquarters ... source never saw the man again nor did any of his comrades..."

"No Action Necessary"

Such reports as these and thousands more like them were — and still are — kept secretly classified from the American people. (The desperate "ZEK" slaves of the KGB at Karanganda revolted in 1953 and hundreds were killed. Thousands more were killed following revolts in the Kolyma area and elsewhere.) Despite government secrecy, a few reports on the Soviet mass-kidnapping of U.S. prisoners leaked into the American press in 1946, largely due to the pressure of family members who refused to give up hope. In the **Wisconsin State Journal** of December 1, 1946 the essential details of the truth were published under the headline: "Iron Curtain shrouds Lee's fate, parents believe Russians hold him with 20,000 other Yanks."

... Frank Lee ... being held prisoner with a reported 20,000 to 25,000 other Americans ... parents began to get a mysterious series of messages from sources abroad saying their son, pilot of the B-24, was among a group of prisoners in Austria ... military governor of Linz unable to check in Russian zone In December (1945) ... a letter stated their son and others had been moved ... from Linz ... farther north in Austria A friend connected with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) later claimed records in Munich bore this out



...Mrs. Lee has been corresponding with Kin Seeking Missing Military Personnel, Inc getting signatures to petitions ... to bring 100,000 signatures to President Truman asking him to terminate all UNNRA shipments to Russia and to postpone loans to that country until she gives us the right to search for missing personnel in zones controlled by the Russians

Despite the basic accuracy of this report, the story died, undoubtedly because secrecy regulations prevented access to documentation and discouraged others from speaking out. Tens of thousands of these petition signatures have been found in the National Archives, marked, "File, no action necessary," and signed by a Pentagon colonel.

Up and Coming Figures

Knowledge of the secret outcome of the Soviet POW kidnapping operation ensured high-level 1945 military and civilian participants a postwar place in the senior hierarchy. Later, high-ranking officials with a demonstrated need-to-know who inquired into the Soviet/POW matter were apparently shown only general briefing papers, which in themselves were Top Secret. Full knowledge of the details of this matter could be regarded as potentially damaging to the careers of later up-and-coming military and political figures.

George Kennan, in 1945 the second-in-command under Averell Harriman in the Moscow Embassy, was later appointed U.S. Ambassador to the USSR. Upon being presented with a small portion of this writer's researched documentation, he wrote from Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study on December 13, 1988: "It would seem to me that the sort of documentation you have sent me should permit you to form a pretty fair picture of the course of these exchanges with the Russians on the part of both the British and ourselves and of the results obtained."

During and after the Korean War, recently declassified CIA documents of the early 1950s indicated that at least 3000-4500, and possibly many more, American prisoners were transferred from North Korea to Manchuria, and also to the Soviet Union, from 1951-1954. U.S. intelligence was aware of secret, special-interrogation "Peace" and "Reform" camps, for Americans judged "procommunist" and "anticommunist." According to CIA Report #SO91634, "Prisoners in the peace and reform camps will not be exchanged."

Over 8000 Americans remain missing in action from the Korean War. General Mark Clark, former commander in Korea who had served under Held Marshal Alexander in Austria, repeatedly stated that the communists had kept many U.S. and Allied POWs from Korea. Live sightings of large numbers of American prisoners from Korea — in the Soviet gulags, in China, and in North Korea — continued at least until 1979. Prisoners who were recovered by the United States reported extensive interrogation of U.S. prisoners by Soviet and communist Chinese intelligence officers, followed by the permanent disappearance of thousands of Americans into the special, secret prison camps on the Manchurian border or inside China.

Recently declassified U.S. government documents clearly indicate that reliable eyewitnesses reported large numbers of U.S. prisoners of war being transferred through Manchuria to Soviet control in Siberia. A March 23, 1954 U.S. Foreign Service dispatch from Hong Kong states (in part):



"A recently arrived Greek refugee from Manchuria has reported seeing several hundred American prisoners of war being transferred from Chinese trains to Russian trains at Manchouli near the border of Manchuria and Siberia The Consulate General agrees with evaluation of the information as probably true Source observed POWs ... loading onto trains for movement into Siberia Source closely observed three POWs who were under guard and were conversing in American English. POWs wore sleeve insignia which indicated POWs were Air Force noncommissioned officers Large number of negroes among POWs "

On orders from Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (April 19, 1954), the United States Embassy in Moscow formally demanded the return of Korean War prisoners from the USSR on May 5, 1954. On May 13, 1954 the Soviets denied holding Americans prisoners from Korea "under Soviet guard." A U.S. State Department spokesman that day in Washington confirmed the exchange, but said he did not know who the prisoners were or how many there were.

By now, most of the men from the Korean War who have survived would be in their late-50s. Of 4000 or more in 1953, many could still be alive in North Korea, China, and the USSR.

Don't Talk About It

Documentary evidence exists in the National Archives that known information on American prisoners was covered up in official responses to questions by Congressional leaders such as then-Senator Lyndon B. Johnson. One example is a series of proposed changes to official State Department answers to the Senate majority leader's request for facts on live American POWs in communist captivity. The net result in the final letter sent to Lyndon Johnson is an attempt to change the "party line" from just under a thousand live American POWs from Korea known to be in communist hands (an already deflated figure) to "American prisoners of war who *might* still be in Communist custody."

At this same time Assistant Secretary of State Walter Stoessel attempted to nip in the bud any curiosity that LBJ might develop in regard to the WWII POW background of the Korean POW impasse: "It is suggested that the following be included in a letter which NA drafts in reply to Senator Johnson: The Department of State has no information to the effect that there are approximately six or eight hundred American soldiers in the custody of the Soviet government. A few of the prisoners of war of other nationalities recently released by the Soviet government have made reports alleging that American citizens are imprisoned in the Soviet Union. All of these reports are being investigated by this Department with the cooperation of other agencies of the government."

The State Department did not possess all the facts, which were buried in top-secret files of the Pentagon and CIA. The compartmentalization of the facts allowed the answering department to be evasive.

In 1955 an American civilian prisoner named John Noble, who had been held in the gulags for over nine years, was released by the Soviet government following the personal intervention of President Eisenhower. Noble brought out information obtained from other prisoners and from the



Ukrainian Bandera underground network indicating that over 3000 Americans were still being held alive in Soviet prisons. These included U.S. POWs held since the end of the Second World War, U.S. airmen captured in Soviet air attacks on post-war American intelligence gathering missions, and U.S. POWs from the Korean War. According to Noble, the U.S. State Department requested that he not talk publicly about the large numbers of U.S. prisoners in the Soviet Union.

Following the Vietnam-Indochina War, the already established policy of high-level national security secrecy concerning non-returned American POWs in Vietnam, Laos, China, and the Soviet Union went into effect immediately. Precise and detailed intelligence on U.S. POWs disappearing in enemy hands was classified and kept highly compartmentalized. The Vietnamese followed the Soviet example of demanding, in exchange for the return of American POWs held hostage, diplomatic recognition and \$3-4 billion in postwar aid promised by the U.S. Former U.S. intelligence officers have stated to this writer that, in addition, lists of known U.S. prisoners with special skills or training, who in fact never returned from Indochina, had been carried in a category known as "MB," or "Moscow Bound," referring to those POWs shipped to the USSR because of their advanced technological skills.

High officials involved in the POW matter — such as Henry Kissinger, his assistant General Brent Scowcroft (now National Security Advisor to President Bush), and Vernon Walters, a former Deputy Director of the CIA and UN Envoy (now U.S. Ambassador to West Germany) — certainly had knowledge of these matters. However, given the past compromise of U.S. negotiating strength on POWs by the abandonment of prisoners in two previous wars and the Intervention, the official options of the United States were limited. Any full exposure of the facts relating to the Vietnam/Laos prisoners would have revealed the shipment of some of them to the Soviet Union for their advanced technological skills and for espionage purposes. This in turn would automatically have raised questions as to the fate of the POWs who disappeared during WWII and Korea.

Thus, the matter again became a national security secret of the highest level. Collection of intelligence on live Americans was discouraged, and officially disbelieved when presented. Former Defense Intelligence (DIA) Director Lieutenant General Eugene Tighe has stated that American POWs remained alive in captivity in Indochina but that intelligence analysts assigned to POW work displayed "a mindset to debunk" live-sighting reports.

Official Policy: Lie!

Officials put in the jobs overseeing the problem were encouraged to downplay the reality and to lie outright to the public when confronted with evidence. This has been confirmed, in private interviews attended by this writer, by former Director of Central Intelligence William Casey, former UN Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick, Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead, Undersecretary Ed Derwinski, Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence Morton Abramowitz, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia Gaston Sigur, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Lambertson, and others in the Pentagon, the CIA, the National Security Council, and the White House.

With this policy guidance, the Vietnam-Laos POW/MIA matter was placed in the hands of such



ruthless officials as former Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage and former NSC Colonel Richard Childress. Their assignment: to actively suppress evidence of live prisoners, hinder or cancel rescue missions in the 1980s, and use the cloak of national security secrecy to hide these and other covert actions. They were given a free rein in conducting U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. (It has ever been the way of powerful leaders to use the most ambitious men to do the worst jobs.)

The initial Stalinist success at using prisoners for blackmail caused a spiraling of POW-retention and hostage-taking that has continued to the present day, through Soviet surrogates, allies, and imitators. This has led directly to the present concern over the limits of national security secrecy in a free state. In any event, attempts to deal secretly with hostage-takers of any type have rarely had satisfactory endings. Over the past 44 years the POW-hostage issue has become bigger than any single President, except perhaps the one who could finally resolve it.

“Curtain of Silence”

Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke, former U.S. Envoy and confidante of several Presidents, recently spoke to this writer on his knowledge of American prisoners withheld by Stalin. His uncle, Ambassador Anthony J. Drexel Biddle, had been U.S. Ambassador to Poland from 1939-1944, having then resigned in disagreement with the Roosevelt Administration’s submissive policy toward Stalin over Poland’s future, following revelation of the Katyn Forest Massacre. Biddle was recommissioned into the Army as a colonel, on Eisenhower’s staff at SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces], in charge of the European Allied Contact Section, involved with the Polish underground and other matters. He eventually became a general, and finished his career as U.S. Ambassador to Spain.

Ambassador Duke remembered his uncle Tony Biddle speaking of American and Allied prisoners remaining in the USSR: “... I do recall Uncle Tony’s concern for the non-return of the POWs taken by the USSR Your documentation is first-rate, and reveals a chapter or chapters of our history of which we are so ashamed that we seem to prefer to draw a curtain of silence and forgetfulness over all ”

These words, in a profound sense, explain America’s non-action in this matter of basic morality and national honor, after each of the last three wars. Even today in an era of “glasnost,” many U.S. newspapers and national publications have declined to publish the full truth of the POW matter, although it is a matter of great concern to many millions of Americans.

Window of Opportunity

With the full history of prisoner- and hostage-taking in mind, the latest Soviet statement of concern for the return of their missing Afghan War prisoners should be viewed as a public diplomatic signal of their willingness to consider an exchange. This opportunity should not be permitted to become a forced repatriation of those 40-50 former Soviet prisoners known to be living in freedom in the U.S. and Canada, or of those Vietnamese who have escaped a modern Stalinist regime.



Since Vietnam has evidenced some fear of dealing honestly with the United States on the fate of known POWs in its control, perhaps the correct approach is to involve Vietnam's powerful ally (and originator of the problem), the Soviet Union. If the Vietnamese feel unable to resolve this issue to the satisfaction of the United States while still expecting U.S. diplomatic recognition, then the Soviet Union should assist its ally by providing a way out of the present dilemma.

America should already be using its influence to gain control of those Soviet POWs in Afghanistan and Pakistan who wish to return home. The Soviet Union should announce that, as part of their campaign of "openness," they will allow American prisoners who have come under their control, in various ways, to return home if they wish to. In matters truly involving the national security of the United States, certain returning prisoners could be sworn to secrecy.

Whose National Interest?

Recent developments in the POW matter in the United States and Canada indicate that American and Allied leaders may have discussed this subject with Soviet leaders prior to and during the recent Malta Summit. U.S. determination to continue a transparent secrecy in this matter, on the grounds of national security, raises the question of whose national interest such secrecy actually serves.

The Soviet domestic press has begun to publish portions of the truth for their own people. Also, during 1989 the USSR propaganda magazine **Soviet Life**, published by governmental agreement in the U.S., admitted some of Stalin's crimes: "... Stalinism implies mass terror, contempt for human life, the massacre of millions of innocent people on political grounds Stalinism means forced labor of millions of people Stalinism means fraud on the state level, fabrication of 'traitors against the homeland,' misrepresented results of collectivization, falsified history of the party, the state and the world."

The publication of such truths by the Soviet Union should challenge the United States government to open some of its own secret files. With the monumental changes apparently taking place in Eastern Europe, more of the history of the 1945 Soviet takeover in those areas is emerging. Once set in motion, such a tide of revelations is difficult to reverse. Given the present "glasnost" mood and Gorbachev's statements on Stalin's crimes, it might finally be to the Soviet Union's advantage to expose the full truth of this matter and restore the surviving prisoners to their homelands.

* Baron Pyotr Nikolaevich Wrangel led a White Russian force of counter-revolutionaries fighting against the regime established in Russia by the Bolsheviks in 1917. Following his appointment as commander-in chief of the monarchist forces in April 1920, Wrangel established a provisional government in the Crimea and scored several victories against the Soviet troops. His defeat late in 1920 marked the end of the White Russian opposition to the Soviet revolutionary government.