

Yeltsin Reveals Soviets Held 12 Americans in the 1950s

Fate of Cold War Captives Still Under Investigation

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Russian President Boris Yeltsin told U.S. senators yesterday that 12 previously unacknowledged Americans were shot down over Soviet territory during the 1950s and were kept in Soviet prisons and psychiatric clinics. The ultimate fate of the Americans is still under investigation, Yeltsin said.

In an acknowledgement that leaders of the former Soviet Union had lied to the United States throughout the Cold War, Yeltsin also said in a letter to the Senate Select Committee on POW and MIA Affairs that hundreds of U.S. servicemen were kept prisoner in the Soviet Union during and after World War II.

The letter was hand-delivered yesterday to committee Chairman John F. Kerry (D-Mass.) and Vice Chairman Robert C. Smith

(R-N.H.) by Gen. Dmitri Volkoganov, a senior military adviser to Yeltsin.

"It has been found out that during the 1950s, nine U.S. aircraft were shot down over the U.S.S.R. territory," the letter said. "The records show that as of Aug. 1, 1953, eight American citizens were held in Soviet prisons and prison camps and four others were held in special psychiatric hospitals." As to what became of them, the letter added, "Their history is being investigated."

Except for the highly publicized downing in 1960 of a U-2 spy plane flown by Francis Gary Powers, a civilian pilot working for the Central Intelligence Agency, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union ever acknowledged that any U.S. planes were shot down over Soviet territory during the Cold War.

Defense Department officials refused to
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Soviets Held 12 Americans in 1950s

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discuss the matter last night, saying they were studying the Yeltsin letter. "The U.S. government was aware of the losses," Susan Strednansky, a Pentagon spokesman, told the Associated Press.

Following a trip to Moscow by Kerry and Smith in March, a U.S.-Russian commission was established to examine documents in Russian archives pertaining to American prisoners-of-war. Volkogonov heads the Russian delegation to the commission, and the U.S. side is led by Malcolm Toon, a former ambassador to the Soviet Union.

On Monday, State Department spokesman Margaret Tutwiler said a preliminary study by the commission had determined that assurances by Soviet leaders—from Nikita Khrushchey to Mikhail Gorbachev—that no Americans were held on Soviet territory were not true. She said the commission also had found "that remains of Americans may still be present" in the former Soviet Union.

Yeltsin, saying that "the war is not over while the last killed soldier

remains unburied," assured the senators that "every possible measure will be taken to remove this problem between the Russian and American peoples. I hope that the work of the bilateral commission will finally provide answers to all the mysteries of the past."

Kerry and Smith called Yeltsin's letter a bold and unprecedented break with past deceptions. "They are admitting the sins of the past," Kerry said, adding that the Russians are actively investigating whether some Americans might have survived up to the present time.

In addition to disclosing the 12 Americans imprisoned during the 1950s, Yeltsin's letter said that during World War II, the Soviets kept 716 U.S. servicemen captive, holding some in isolation for more than a year. Yeltsin added that Soviet leaders knew about more than 500 Americans captured by China and North Korea, and Soviet officials interrogated at least 59 of these Korean War prisoners.

During the World War II period, Yeltsin said, the Soviets interned for varying times about 23,000 U.S. citizens, mostly POWs freed by the Soviet army from German prison

camp. The majority, 22,554, were repatriated in 1945 and 1946.

"However, not all U.S. citizens were brought home," the letter said. Three died before they could be repatriated, and 114, reportedly Americans of German origin, were found to have fought for Germany and were tried and sent to Soviet prisons. Some died, a few escaped and at least 82 ultimately were released, the letter added.

During the war, Yeltsin continued, 716 Americans, mostly crew members of planes forced down in Soviet territory, were held. "The Stalin government applied a double standard with respect to these people—some were immediately and with honors handed over to the U.S. side, while others were held in isolation for a year or more," Yeltsin wrote.

He said Russian researchers so far have not found any material about U.S. soldiers missing in action in Vietnam or elsewhere in Southeast Asia. He added, though, that some American soldiers, seeking to avoid the Vietnam fighting, "were moved clandestinely from Japan to the USSR . . . for a short period and later went to various European countries."

Yeltsin tells about downed U.S. planes

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The Soviet Union shot down nine U.S. planes in the early 1950s and held 12 American survivors in prisons or psychiatric clinics, Russian President Boris Yeltsin said in a letter hand-delivered to U.S. senators Friday.

The fate of the fliers is being investigated, he said.

Other than the shooting down of Francis Gary Powers' spy plane in 1960, neither U.S. nor Soviet officials had formally acknowledged that American planes had been downed over the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

"The U.S. government was aware of the losses, but this is the first time the Russians have admitted" there were survivors, said Susan Strednansky, a Defense Department spokeswoman.

Mr. Yeltsin, who will meet President Bush at a Washington summit next week, also said in his unprecedented acknowledgement that Soviet records show:

— Several U.S. servicemen in World War II were held and detained "in isolation for a year or more" in what he called a "double standard" by the Stalin government.

— Some American prisoners in the Korean War were taken to China and held there and that 59 captured U.S. servicemen were interrogated by Soviet officials.

— The only information found so far in Soviet archives about U.S. troops missing in the Vietnam War is

that several detectors were clandestinely moved from the territory of Japan to the territory of the U.S.S.R."

He said the records show that they remained in the Soviet Union only "for a short period of time and later went to various European countries."

The letter was delivered to Sens. John Kerry, D-Mass., and Bob Smith, R-N.H., chairman and vice chairman of the Senate POW-MIA Affairs Committee, by Gen. Dmitri Volkogonov, a senior defense adviser to Mr. Yeltsin.

"It has been found out that during the 1950s, nine U.S. aircraft were shot down over the U.S.S.R. territory," Mr. Yeltsin said. "The records show that as of Aug. 1, 1953, eight American citizens were held in Soviet prisons and prison camps and four others were held in special psychiatric hospitals."

"We do not yet know the full measure of who they are or what happened to those who were detained, whether some may have survived, whether they stayed or what," Mr. Kerry said. "This is the first cut. There are obviously other things that need to be filled out."

The Defense Department spokeswoman said American officials have yet to translate or analyze new Russian documents turned over Friday by Mr. Volkogonov and other documents provided to the United States earlier this week in Moscow.