

Mystery POW's Past--A

Associated Press

Bangkok, Thailand

Bobby Joe Keesee, the lone civilian to be released in Hanoi today, appears to be a middle-aged soldier of misfortune who hijacked a Thai charter plane 2½ years ago and forced the pilot to fly him to North

Vietnam.

He's also an Army deserter with a prison record in Arizona who once sought refuge in Cuba but was refused.

Bira Air, the Thai charter company, said Keesee hired one of its single-engine Cessnas in September, 1970,

at \$60 an hour on the pretext he was scouting locations for a motion picture.

The pilot, Sangiem Poomketkaew, said he flew Keesee all over northeast Thailand for four days and on the fifth took off from Ubon to return to Bangkok.

"We had been flying for

Cuban Adventure

about 20 minutes when the foreigner pulled a gun and said, 'Fly that way,' pointing to Laos and Vietnam," the pilot said.

"He told us to shut off the radio. My co-pilot and I tried to work out a way to disarm him but the plane was too small to move about in.

"We flew over Laos and we were hit in the tail by ground fire.

"We told him we were short of fuel and that we had been hit but he said, 'I don't care.'

"We told him we would have to land. We put down

See Back Page

From Page 1

on a beach between Vinh and Dong Hoi.

"When we landed, villagers and children ran around the plane. He jumped out with a small James Bond briefcase and walked across the sand to the village.

"We took off and flew back to Thailand."

A Bangkok newspaper reported at the time that Keesee had arrived from Manila on Aug. 31, 1970, gave his age as 36, and said he had been held prisoner by Palestinian guerrillas in Jordan for 36 hours two months before.

He was described as "short, fat and crew cut."

Hanoi never said a word about its uninvited guest until it included his name on the first of POWs to be freed today.

BACKGROUND

Keesee's sister, Mrs. T. O. Riley of Amarillo, Tex., said in 1962 that he was born in Allison, Tex., the youngest of six children and that she took care of him from the time he was a year old.

She said he quit school in the eighth grade, later enlisted in the National Guard



AP Wirephoto

BOBBY JOE KEESEE
He was arrested in 1962

and then joined the paratroopers in 1951.

Mrs. Riley said Keesee was wounded during the Korean War and was given the Purple heart and other medals. She said a steel plate had to be put in his head from a head wound he suffered.

CUBA

The sister said Keesee served 11 years in the Army, much of the time overseas, including duty in Russia. She did not elaborate.

In 1962, he deserted from Ft. Huachuca, Ariz., flew to Cuba in a single-engine plane he had rented and asked for asylum. Forty-nine days later the Cubans returned him to face trial in Arizona on 153 charges.

All but one of the charges, transporting a stolen car across state lines, were dropped, and he was found guilty and sentenced to five years in prison. He served two.

During his trial he claimed his activities were part of a cloak-and-dagger Central Intelligence Agency operation to give him a credible cover story for dropping two anti-Castro guerrilla organizers into Cuba.

FATHER

Keesee's father, Payton B. Keesee of Phoenix, said at the time of the Cuban incident that his son had served 2½ years as an embassy guard — he didn't say where — and "I just know he'll wind up in Russia."

"There are two sides to every question," the father said. "I'm not intending to hold up for my boy . . . but he was always such a level-headed kid."