

Cambodia

New Charge in A War Coverup

Washington

A former Green Beret sergeant accused the Pentagon yesterday of contributing to cover up the extent of secret U.S. military operations in Laos and Cambodia. He also charged that government officials had deliberately understated the number of Americans killed on those operations.

"Now that the cat's out of the bag," said Thomas J. Marzullo of Stamford, Conn., "Why in the hell can't we at least be honest?"

Marzullo, 24, was referring to the Pentagon admission Tuesday that 81 American servicemen have been killed in action while on intelligence or rescue missions inside Laos and Cambodia since 1965.

It was reported that the deaths had been reported to the victims' families as having taken place in South Vietnam — a cover story parallel to that used to hide the secret bombing of Cambodia by B-52s in 1969 and 1970.

TEAMS

Jerry W. Friedheim, the Pentagon spokesman, said subsequently at a news briefing that "These intelligence operations, which involved joint teams of U.S. and usually South Vietnamese personnel, were involved in gathering information in the sanctuary areas along the border between Laos and Cambodia."

"Chances are they're both dead," Marzullo said of the Green Berets, "but they're both listed as missing."

New York Times

In a series of telephone interviews, Marzullo, now a college student, told of participating in or learning of scores of clandestine Green Beret missions involved kidnappings, ambushes and planned attacks on enemy supply and intelligence outposts as far as 40 miles inside Laos.

As many as ten Americans, accompanied by equal numbers of U.S.-trained mercenaries, participated in the operations, he said, and they often dressed in North Vietnamese, Viet Cong or Chinese uniforms.

Casualties were frequently heavy, he recalled, but only those whose bodies were returned and identifiable were officially listed as killed in action. The dead who were left behind, he added, were listed as missing.

FIGURES

"What I'm trying to say is that the figure of 81 Americans killed cannot compensate for all the casualties I saw and heard about in my brief time over there," he asserted. "And that war was going on for a hell of a lot longer than my tour of duty. Eighty-one is simply not a feasible number." Marzullo served in the Special Forces in Southeast Asia from 1969-71.

Friedheim conceded that "it's entirely likely" that some of the 1300 men listed as missing in action could have been involved in the secret operations in Laos and Cambodia. But he minimized that possibility in effect by noting that American ground troops had been in overt operations during the 1970 Cambodian invasion and the similar penetration of Laos in 1971 and that the men could have been listed as missing in those actions.

Asked about Marzullo's comments, Lieutenant General Daniel James Jr., of the Air Force, another Pentagon spokesman, said that 110 men were listed as killed in action in the Vietnam war although their bodies had not been recovered. In those cases, he said—they apparently did not include intelligence operations — the victims were reported dead by colleagues on the scene.

OPERATION

Marzullo told of an operation during the summer of 1971 in which a secret Green Beret radio relay outpost inside Laos was overrun by North Vietnamese troops. "We know that one of the Green Berets was dead when last seen, and another was seen crawling into a mortar pit with a wound," the former sergeant recalled. The North Vietnamese eventually withdrew, he said, but no movement was sighted and the facility was saturation bombed in an attempt to deny the enemy any undamaged radio equipment.