SFChronicle MAY 2 1 1973

The Mystery of Missing POWs

46 Men Not on Dead List

By Joseph Albright
Chronicle Correspondent

Washington

The Defense Department is quietly trying to resolve the mystery of what happened to 46 men lost in the Vietnam war who are still being officially carried as prisoners of war.

Most are flyers downed over North Vietnam. When they were originally lost, U.S. military officials put them in the POW category on the basis of some evidence or intelligence information suggesting they had been captured alive. And yet, when the prisoner exchanges were finished on March 29, they did not come back.

Some weeks ago, the North Vietnamese supplied a list of prisoners who had died in captivity. However, the 46 men were not on the list.

FUSS

Where are they? And why isn't the government making a public fuss about them?

The best answer available from Defense and State Department officials is that the United States does not know of any specific POW who is still alive and in captivity.

On the other hand, the Defense Department has quietly pressed the North Vietnamese for explanations of what happened to the 46 men still listed on the military rosters as "non-returned POWs." It has gotten no satisfactory answers.

The 587 Americans who returned from Vietnamese prisons were all asked whether they knew any of those still carried on the POW and MIA lists. According to Pentagon officials, these debriefing sessions yielded no evidence that any Americans are still being held in Viet Cong or North Vietnamese camps.

So far, there has been only one intelligence report which leads the experts to believe that are still some Americans being held alive. According to this report, there are about seven white men being held captive in Cambodia.

PROOF

If confirmed, the seven could include newsmen or American civilians. It could also include a few GIs declared to be "missing" during the Cambodia invasion of 1970. So far, the Defense Department has no proof that the report is true. Key officials believe it probably is.

The case of Navy Lieutenant Ronald Dodge is perhaps the most difficult for the Defense Department investigators to explain.

Dodge was shot down over Hanoi on May 17, 1967 and was seen parachuting to the ground. The following September, a French magazine published a clear photograph by a Dutch free-lance photographer showing Dodge in Hanoi wearing bandages but looking healthy. The photograph later appeared in the U.S. on the cover of Life magazine.

This was more than enough evidence to put Dodge on the Pentagon's lists of American POWs. Yet he was not returned. And none of the returning POWs ever remember seeing him in prison camps.

OTHERS

Among the others listed as "non-returned POWs" in the Pentagon's internal records:

- Air Force Captain Samuel E. Waters, shot down in December, 1966, in North Vietnam. In the few days following the downing of his plane, there were conflicting press reports about whether he was captured alive. However, more than a month later, a Bulgarian newspaper printed what it said were quotes from Captain Waters, along with pictures of his identification documents.
- Navy Lieutenants Walter O. Estes and James E. Teague, shot down near Haiphong in November, 1967. Within a few days, the North Vietnamese news agency sent a story to Poland with photographs of their ID cards. The caption described them as "captured in Haiphong."
- Navy Lieutenant Commander Vincent D. Monroe shot down in North Vietnam in May, 1968. Emergency radio signals were received from him on the ground, indicating he was alive after landing. Subsequently, Hanoi Radio announced the capture of an unidentified American flyer at the same time and place.

AP Wirephoto

A Search for Bodies

A member of the American team checking on U.S. graves in Vietnam used a metal-detector recently to sweep over the reported site of a 1969 helicopter crash. The exploration, in Camau Peninsula, is part of the effort to account for all U.S. dead in the Vietnam War.