

No Record of Him

A Mysterious Civilian POW

Washington

The State Department yesterday made public the name of an American civilian who apparently had himself flown to a beach in North Vietnam more than two years ago and was captured as a prisoner of war.

The mysterious civilian, Bobby Joe Keesee, is among the 108 POWs to be set free by the North Vietnamese tomorrow.

A State Department spokesman said Keesee's name was on the list of POWs initially identified by Hanoi January 27, but that it had not been made public before yesterday because the State Department had no idea who the man was or what he was doing in North Vietnam until "very recently."

"It's one of the stranger stories of the year," the spokesman said. "To tell the truth, we're anxious to get him back here and ask him about it ourselves."

UNKNOWN

State Department sources said North Vietnam had listed Keesee as a military POW, but that the U.S. armed forces had no record of him. Nor did the State Department have any record of a civilian by that name anywhere in Southeast Asia.

"We went back through file after file," a spokesman said. "Finally, we ran across a report attributed to a Thai pilot who said that in

September, 1970, he either flew or was caused to fly an American civilian to North Vietnam.

"Apparently they put him down on a beach in North Vietnam."

"At the time we first saw that report we discounted it because it was so far out. We didn't think there was anything to it, but apparently there was."

MYSTERY

Just what happened to Keesee after he was set down on the beach remains — for the time at least — a mystery.

"We have no record of his even being in Thailand, much less North Vietnam," the spokesman said.

Asked if Keesee was attached to the Central Intelligence Agency, the spokesman: "No. Mr. Keesee is, as far as we can tell, a totally private individual. He was apparently acting on his own."

Keesee originally lived in Amarillo, Tex. His parents have since moved elsewhere in the Southwest, and have requested the State Department not to make public their address because of the bizarre circumstances surrounding their son's adventure.

Informed sources said the parents did not even know where their son was until the State Department finally identified him and contacted them.

United Press

See this file 14, 15, 19 Mar 73.

Keesee's name is on third list of POWs, published 13 Mar 73, the only civilian on the list. List is filed POWs under date of 28 Jan 73, where all lists are clipped together. POW file has been checked only through 31 Mar 73.

See also "Gunmen Abduct a U.S. Consul" (Guadalajara, Mexico) in separate file, under date of 5 May 73. [That file should also be checked for later developments on Keesee.