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Mysterious Prisoner Is Said to Be a Texan Ex-G.I.

WASHINGTON, March 13 (UPI)—Bobby Joe Keesee's sister said today that he walked out of her home in Albuquerque, N. M., in May, 1970, for "not over an hour" to get his car repaired. Their next meeting will come when the latest group of war prisoners freed by North Vietnam arrives home.

Keesee's name puzzled both the State Department and the Defense Department when it turned up on the list of prisoners held by North Vietnam, and the circumstances of his capture are still obscure.

But according to his sister, Mrs. John R. Brangle, court records and his own past accounts, Keesee is a Texas soldier of fortune who won a Bronze Star as an Army paratrooper in Korea.

He later apparently flew a stolen plane to Cuba, faced 152 Federal charges on his return, ranging from passing bad checks to car theft, and asserted he had been held hostage by Palestinian guerrillas before arriving in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1970.

An eighth-grade school dropout, Keesee joined the national Guard and then the Army, serving as a paratrooper in 1951 in the Korean war. He was wounded while attempting to rescue some captured soldiers and was awarded the Bronze star.

On March 23, 1962, Cuban authorities reported that a Sgt. Bobby J. Keesee had landed a light plane at the Havana airport and asked for political asylum.

However, 49 days later, he was quietly returned to the United States where he was arrested on charges of having stolen a light plane in Albuquerque. The plane theft came as the climax of a 13,000-mile, 25-state tour in a stolen car during which, he admitted in court, he wrote "50 or 60" bad checks. He was also listed by the Army as absent without leave from his base at Fort Huachuca, Ariz.

Facing 152 Federal charges, Keesee was sentenced on July 12, 1962, in Austin, Tex., to five years in prison and fined \$2,500 for transporting a stolen vehicle across state lines.

In October, 1962, he received a five-year sentence in Albuquerque for interstate transportation of stolen aircraft.

At his trial in Austin, Keesee declared that he had been on an assignment for the Central Intelligence Agency and had deliberately built up a criminal reputation as part of his cover in preparation for an espionage mission over Cuba.

He said he had dropped his C.I.A. contact, "Buddy Carson," and a Cuban companion named "José" by parachute over Cuba,

and had been forced down himself by Cuban fighter planes.

The Government maintained at his trial that "Carson" had never existed.

Keesee was paroled in 1965. His sister refused to comment on the Cuban adventure but his father, Payrol Keesee, who now lives in Phoenix, Ariz., said today:

"He's done one hell of a lot for his country. He fought in that bloody war in Korea for four years and laid in a hospital nine months after losing part of an arm. They weren't human enough to write about what he did for his country and now what little he's done wrong, that's great news."

The elder Keesee said he last saw his son in 1969 before the son left for what he said was a job flying aircraft for Israel.

In May, 1970, he showed up briefly in Albuquerque for a visit with his sister.

"The oddest thing happened," Mrs. Brangle said in describing the visit. "I was fixing dinner and he said he was going down to get his car fixed. He said he would be at the Shell service station around the corner. He said he would be right back, not over an hour. That was the last I laid eyes on him."

Although he told Mrs. Brangle he was going to Alaska and Jerusalem, Keesee next turned up in Bangkok in September, 1970, and told a newspaper there he had been held in Jordan as a hostage by Palestinian guerrillas. He had also written his sister of being a hostage in a hotel in Amman, Jordan.