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They Deserve to Come Home

Barbara Robertson's conviction is unshaken. Despite her government's campaign to discredit the now-famous POW photo that hit the front pages of newspapers nationwide in July, she is certain that one of the three men pictured is her husband, John. "The minute I saw it I knew it was him... definitely, without a doubt." She is not alone. Other family members and friends have also positively identified him and resolutely have refused to budge.

Twenty-five years ago, on September 16, 1966, Air Force Colonel John Leighton Robertson, who now would be 60 years old, was shot down over Laos. Also reportedly pictured with Robertson are two other pilots lost over Laos: Navy Lt. Larry James Stevens, now 50, missing since February 14, 1969; and Air Force Major Albro Lynn Lundy, Jr., now 58, missing since December 24, 1970. The Lundy and Stevens families have also come forward and positively identified their men in the photograph.

Soon after the Robertson/Lundy/Stevens picture surfaced, more photos of POWs began to appear. The two most convincing photographs are purported to be of Navy Lt. Daniel V. Borah, Jr., now 45, MIA in Laos since September 24, 1972; and (in the other photo) Army Special Forces Captain Donald Gene Carr, now 52, MIA in Laos since July 6, 1971.

The families of both men have judged the pictures to be authentic. Are the families of these five men deluded? Are they so desperate for evidence of their loved ones' survival that they are being duped by clever hoaxes and exploited by unscrupulous POW/MIA con artists? Are the photos fakes, taken from Soviet magazines, as is being insinuated by U.S. government officials?

Credibility Problem

For the last several weeks THE NEW AMERICAN has been investigating these and related stories. We have interviewed many of the immediate relatives of each of the five men, as well as their very close friends, former comrades in arms, and one of the country's leading forensic experts. We have also examined the statements of government officials that have been directed at debunking the photographs, as well as the way that the establishment media have treated the issue. As we expected when we began our research, it is the government and the establishment media that have the credibility problem.

Eighteen years ago, thousands of American POWs and MIAs in Southeast Asia, many of whom were known to be alive, were abandoned, written off as dead, by the United States government. During February and March of 1973, 591 POWs were repatriated under the banner of Operation Homecoming. That should have been just the first installment of many. But on April 12, 1973 Assistant Secretary of Defense Roger Shields declared that there was "no evidence that there were any more POWs still alive in all of Indochina." Dr. Shields was merely following a directive



issued by the State Department that flatly stated: “There are no more prisoners in Southeast Asia. They are all dead.”

It was a lie. Nine days earlier, on April 3, 1973, the Communist Pathet Lao forces had declared that they were holding Americans in Laos and were prepared to give an accounting. That didn’t matter to Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon and company.

A year later, in April 1974, the Department of Defense concluded authoritatively that several hundred live American POWs remained captive in Southeast Asia. But the families of the missing men, and the American’ people, were still being told there was “no evidence” of any remaining POWs.

The “no evidence” policy has remained in place through four successive administrations, both Democrat and Republican, which is hardly surprising since all four have been run by the same Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Insiders. On July 26 of this year, the President’s national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, a long-time CFR member, told reporters that there is “no credible evidence” that any U.S. servicemen are being held in Vietnam, and suggested the photo of the three fliers is a fake. President Bush (CFR) agreed with Scowcroft, saying “... I back him fully — there is no hard evidence of prisoners being alive.”

But the writing is on the wall: The official lies and cover-ups that have consigned American POWs and their families to a hellish roller-coaster of anguish and uncertainty for two decades are now collapsing. The collapse began long before the recent photographs came to light. As Senator Jesse Helms noted in October of last year, “Public opinion polls continue to suggest that 62 percent of the American people believe that U.S. POW/MIAs are still alive in Vietnam, and 84 percent of Vietnam veterans believe so. Clearly, the U.S. government no longer maintains credibility on this issue.”

Policy of Abandonment

Since then the credibility gap has widened to a gigantic chasm. That process was greatly aided by a two-part series on POW/MIAs by researchers John M. G. Brown and Thomas V. Ashworth that appeared in the May 21 and June 4, 1990 issues of THE NEW AMERICAN. Those articles brought to light for the first time the shocking comprehensive record of a consistent U.S. policy of abandonment of tens of thousands of American POWs from World War I through Vietnam. It was the pioneering research of Vietnam veterans Brown and Ashworth that also provided much of the basis for the two explosive reports issued by Senator Helms and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Minority Staff in October 1990 and May 1991.

For the first time members of Congress had access to the classified files on American POW/MIAs in Southeast Asia. What they found they characterized as “very disturbing.” In spite of assurances from the present and past administrations that accounting for our missing men in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia is the “highest national priority,” the researchers found no evidence of commitment by our policy makers to resolve the issue.

Instead they found a commitment to the political thesis that all remaining MIAs are dead.



Furthermore, stated the committee report, “in order to discredit any information which might undermine the political thesis, the analysis of intelligence files fell into a systematic pattern of debunking information contrary to the thesis. This systematic debunking included discrediting of reports, possible intimidation of witnesses, dismissal of credible evidence through technicalities, and — if all else failed — the arbitrary disregard of evidence contrary to the thesis.”

An example of this “systematic debunking” cited by the committee staff involves the handling of the more than 1,400 live-sighting reports. After studying the raw intelligence data, the staff researchers concluded that DOD’s Defense Intelligence Agency “made significant errors in drawing conclusions about live-sighting reports” and “spent an excessive amount of effort in discrediting live-sighting reports, while exaggerating or mishandling forensic data in order to confirm a presumptive finding of death.”

“Out of the 1,400 live-sighting reports,” said the Helms committee study, “approximately 1,200 are considered by DIA to be ‘resolved.’ Each of the so-called ‘resolved’ sightings was resolved by concluding that the live-sighting report did not pertain to U.S. POWs present after 1979.” By hewing rigidly to the political thesis and ignoring or rejecting all evidence to the contrary, “DOD has been able to construct a rationale to discredit ‘officially’ nearly each and every live-sighting report.” Based on their investigation, the Senate researchers recommended a review of many of the “resolved” cases.

The establishment media, always ready to declare anathema any military policy that employs secrecy in the interest of national security, seems perfectly willing in this case to accept without question the Pentagon’s word on live sightings. In the past few weeks, print and broadcast media have repeated over and over again, DOD’s spurious figures on live POW sightings as if they were gospel. This in spite of the fact that the only independent review of the raw intelligence files on live sightings found the DOD analysis to be flawed, biased and unreliable.

Likewise, the media continue to report as fact the standard DOD figure of 2,273 American servicemen still unaccounted for from the Vietnam War, even though the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Minority Staff investigations indicated that the actual number of POWs may be double that number, or around 5,000. If this is true, then the North Vietnamese communists returned only 12 to 15 percent of our POWs, which means that they kept 85 percent or more of our men whom they held captive.

Please note that Woodward and Bernstein, Koppel, Rather, Jennings and Brokaw are not tripping over each other in a mad rush to investigate this minor discrepancy. Neither are we likely to see **60 Minutes**, **20/20**, **Prime Time** or any other major investigative program devote significant coverage to any of the many other important disclosures published in the Senate POW reports.

Picture Worth a Thousand Words

These developments, together with the tremendous quantity and quality of new information gleaned by the staffs of Senators Helms and Grassley from DIA’s classified documents, have made a whole new ball game out of the POW/MIA issue.



But it is the photographs of the POWs that have captured the attention of the American people, breathed new life and hope into the families of the missing, and put the issue back on the front burner again. The question remains, though: Are they genuine or fake?

Considering the government's own record of "systematic debunking" of all live POW/MIA evidence, it is tempting to view the current effort to discredit the photos as strong *prima facie* evidence of their authenticity. The pictures must stand on their own merits, however. And from our investigation over the past several weeks, all three of the main photos in question (seen in the article) appear to do just that.

It is the photograph of the POW trio that has drawn the most critical response.

"If you look carefully at what has been said, you'll notice that they're trying to discredit the photo through inuendo," says Albro Lundy III, a California attorney and son of the missing Air Force flyer. "The government says it [the photo] has been linked to a Cambodian source known to deal in forgeries. So without directly saying it is a fake, they create that impression. The man on the street is likely to say, 'Oh yeah, that's the photo they found was a hoax.'"

"The thing to remember," Barbara Robertson told THE NEW AMERICAN, "is that they never come right out and say the men in this photo are not who we say they are We're willing to concede that the sign [that the three men appear to be holding] could be fake, but that doesn't change the fact of who the men are. They are not fake."

Mrs. Robertson hastens to add that the glossy photos that the family members have are much clearer than the grainy prints that have appeared in the press. The facial features, head shapes and expressions are "unmistakable."

What of the criticism that the three men are wearing Soviet uniforms that are too hot and heavy for use in the jungles of Southeast Asia? "First of all," notes Mrs. Robertson, "it's cold at some places and at certain times in the jungle. It's not always warm. But, more importantly, we don't know where the picture was taken. They could be in the Soviet Union. They might be 'Moscow Bound' or 'China Bound.'"

And the allegation that the photo is actually three Soviet soldiers and was taken from a Soviet magazine? "It's just that — an allegation. We've never been shown this supposed Soviet magazine, and no one we know has actually seen this photo in any Soviet publication," Mrs. Robertson told THE NEW AMERICAN. "But even if it did appear in some Soviet publication, that wouldn't change who the men are."

"There's one thing the Department of Defense just can't shake," Jack Fleckenstein, Lt. Larry Stevens' stepfather; told us. "There are three men in that photo, and there are three families all saying, 'Those are our men.' The families have had the photo subjected to every kind of analysis available, and so has the government. If they had found anything to disprove our identification they would have come down with everything, instead of all this mealy mouth insinuation with all these irrelevant side issues. If the government had put out half the effort to locate and return our guys as they have to discredit this evidence, they might be home by now."



This unwavering certainty by so many of the people who knew them best argues strongly for the authenticity of all three of the photos. These are not hysterical family members desperately grasping at any straw in the wind. They are people of amazingly strong character and mental toughness who have endured years of agony, frustration and sorrow over the uncertain plight of their loved ones. Many of them had finally accepted the government's verdict that their father, son, husband, or brother was dead. They would not lightly entertain false hopes. They would not reopen those painful chapters they had laid to rest without the most convincing evidence.

“I Knew Immediately...”

Dan and Betty Borah of Olney, Illinois are 100 percent sure that the POW photo that appeared in Newsweek magazine's July 29th issue is indeed their son, Navy Lt. Daniel V. Borah. “We know without a doubt that he is he,” says Mrs. Borah. Several years ago Mr. and Mrs. Borah accepted the Navy's presumptive finding of death. “Now we have great hopes that he is alive.”

Kathy Borah Duez, sister of the missing pilot, told THE NEW AMERICAN that her reaction to the photo was immediate, visceral and powerful. “My body reacted My heart fell down to my feet — I knew immediately it was him,” she said. “I'm 100 percent sure, no doubt at all.”

After examining the photograph and comparing it with earlier photos of Borah, Dr. Michael Charney, professor of anthropology and director of the forensic science laboratory at Colorado State University, is also convinced that the man in the photo is the missing Navy flyer. Charney, a leading critic of the Pentagon's Central Identification Laboratory, has helped many POW families identify the remains that they have received from the government.

There are actually 17 different photos of POW Borah. The pictures were obtained by Nashville Circuit Court Judge Hamilton Gayden, who has been active in POW/MIA circles for many years. Gayden was able to get the photographs through the efforts of his bailiff, a Laotian-American who has contact with anti-communist Laotian guerillas.

The Donald Carr photos (there are several) present some interesting problems for the debunkers. The origin of the photos is known: There is an easily recognizable, striking resemblance between the recent picture and Carr's pre-MIA photos. Family members, friends, and armed forces buddies agree the man in the photo is Don Carr; the match has been confirmed by professional technical analysis.

The photographs were brought out of Southeast Asia by retired Air Force Colonel Jack Bailey, leader of the POW/MIA activist group Operation Rescue. According to Bailey, the snapshots were taken in February 1990 by a “Laotian source who has associations with the Laotian government.” Bailey gave the Laotian a camera, blue polo shirt, wristwatch and sandals, and told him if he found any POWs to take photos of them wearing those articles so that he would know that the picture was taken on that trip. “The Laotian returned the camera to Bailey with the exposed film still in it,” Operation Rescue spokesman Larry Stark told THE NEW AMERICAN. “We were able to develop the film ourselves without a middle man, so there was no funny business.”

All seven of Carr's surviving blood relatives have identified the man in the POW photograph as



Donald G. Carr. Matthew Carr, an Indiana school administrator, recognizes his brother “without a doubt.” Karen Miller, a first cousin who grew up with, and was very close to, Donald “Butch” Carr, told THE NEW AMERICAN, “There’s no question, that’s Butch. It’s easy to match him up with his earlier photos. But what is even more striking is how much he looks like my uncle (his father) at the same age. It looks just like him.”

Carr’s former commanding officer and at least eight others who served with him are certain the snapshot is of their old comrade at arms. “I was with him the day he went in. That’s Donny Carr,” says Captain James E. Butler, who served with Carr in the secret Special Operations Group. Air Force Colonel Kenneth Kullberg, who was on the same covert operations team, told THE NEW AMERICAN he also is “positive it’s him.”

After extensive testing and photo analysis, Dr. Michael Charney declared that the Donald G. Carr in a 1961 wedding picture and the man who appeared in the POW snapshot were one and the same.

DOD Acknowledgment

According to several different sources in Washington, it appears that the Department of Defense may actually be close to publicly acknowledging the Carr photo as genuine. Carl Ford, Jr., the Pentagon’s point man on the MIA issue, has, reportedly, already done so privately. On August 6th, Ford delivered the first real fissure in the government’s permanent “no evidence” position. Speaking before a Senate committee, Ford expressed his “personal belief” that a “small group, perhaps 10” POWs from the Vietnam War remain alive in Southeast Asia. A small concession, but a major step, for the government.

One of the benefits of the timing of the release of the POW photos was to create a national climate that assured passage of Senate Resolution 82, by Senator Bob Smith (RNH), to establish a Temporary Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs. Moreover, the three most responsible Senators on this issue — Helms, Grassley and Smith — were all appointed to the new committee, thus assuring that a genuine effort will be made to use the committee’s powers and resources to get to the bottom of the POW/MIA issue.

“I believe that the issue has entered a whole new stage and it will never again be like it was in the last 10-12 years,” former Congressman John LeBoutillier, a long-time POW activist, told THE NEW AMERICAN. “I am very hopeful that we may soon see some POWs coming home. The Senate Committee will keep this alive. It will help stop the Administration from normalizing relations with North Vietnam unless we have a full accounting of all our men. It will also make it much more likely that other [Col. Millard] Pecks will be coming out” with inside information.

But if the recent events have brought new hope and encouragement to POW families and supporters, they have also brought a new sense of urgency. Time may be running out for many of these men who are still alive. Illness, malnutrition, exhaustion, abuse, torture, despair — each day they remain in captivity increases the likelihood that they may succumb to the dangers of captivity. A continuous outpouring of correspondence to Congress, the President and to the



government of Vietnam is being urged by POW/MIA families and activist organizations, so that both governments recognize the depth of commitment the American people feel for this issue and the priority it must command.

“So much time, so many years have already been lost,” says Barbara Robertson. “My husband was a career officer, 34 years old with four children. He has spent 25 years in captivity. He put his life on the line and fought for his country, and we have to fight for him and for all of the other POW/MIAs now. He deserves to come home; they all do. They deserve our best effort.”