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THE CUBAN PROGRAM: TORTURE OF AMERICAN PRISONERS BY CUBAN AGENTS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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THE CUBAN PROGRAM: TORTURE OF AMERICAN PRISONERS BY CUBAN AGENTS

Thursday, November 4, 19994House of Representatives,

COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:10 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Benjamin A. Gilman (Chairman of the Committee) Presiding.

Chairman GILMAN. The Committee will come to order. Members please take their seats.

Between July 1967 and August 1968 a team of interrogators, believed to be Cubans, brutally beat and tortured 19 American airmen, killing one in the prisoner of war camp known as "The Zoo." I want to thank Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, our distinguished Chairman of our Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade for her leadership in pursuing this issue.

I served on the Select Committee that initially investigated the fate of American prisoners of war and those missing in action, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today. This morning, we will hear testimony from two distinguished panels.

On our first panel, we are honored to have three former prisoners of war, including two who were subjected to the so-called "Cuban Program": Captain Raymond Vohden, who later served with the Defense Department's POW-Missing Personnel office, and Air Force Colonel Jack Bomar, of Arizona. Our other witnesses include Michael Benge, a foreign service officer who was a prisoner of war in Vietnam for 5 years; and Andres Garcia, the Vice President of the Cuban American Veterans Association.

On our second panel, we will be joined by Robert Jones, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Prisoner of War and Missing Personnel Affairs; and Robert Destatte of the Defense Department's Prisoner of War-Missing Personnel office.

Recent press reports have revived interest in this terrible chapter of the Vietnam War and raised hopes that those responsible for those crimes can be identified. In that regard, we have written to FBI Director Louis Freeh to ask the Bureau for its assistance in pursuing information in the files of former Soviet Bloc countries regarding the Cuban program.

Those who murdered or tortured our American servicemen are still at large somewhere, possibly in Cuba. There is no statute of limitations on the crimes committed against these American servicemen. Neither shall there be a statute of limitations on our commitment to discovering the true identity of those responsible for such crimes, so that they may be brought to justice. Our Nation

owes this to the courageous men and women who served us so loyally in Vietnam.

Before we begin with our first panel, let me ask our Ranking Member, Congressman—Judge Hastings, if he would like to make any opening remarks.

Mr. HASTINGS. In the interest of time I will ask that any comment that I make be inserted in the record.

I would like to thank Ileana Ros-Lehtinen for her leadership in this effort.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman GILMAN. Dr. Cooksey has asked to be recognized.

Mr. COOKSEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My request, Mr. Chairman is that we minimize opening statements as much as possible. I am particularly interested in this issue. I want the facts out. I would like to have the maximum amount of time with these witnesses. Due to a counter-request, I am not going to demand that we have a total limit of time. But I hope we can get to the witnesses.

Chairman GILMAN. We will get to the witnesses as quickly as possible. I would like to recognize the distinguished Chairman of the Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen, the gentle lady from Florida.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much. I would like to thank you, Chairman Gilman, for convening this hearing and for your leadership and commitment. This issue is particularly important to me for various reasons; but most importantly, as I read through the accounts of what our men and women in uniform have endured throughout this century of war, I think of my husband, Dexter Lehtinen, who served in the Special Forces in Vietnam and was injured in combat—he was relatively fortunate, but so many were not.

I look at our POW's who are here today, many in our audience especially, and I am humbled by their sacrifices and honored to know them. I thank them for sharing their stories with us. I know that it is difficult, but their presence is indicative of their caliber as human beings and as citizens in the service of our country.

The Geneva Convention prohibits "violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture and outrages upon personal dignity and particular humiliating and degrading treatment." This is exactly what took place at a prison camp in North Vietnam known as "The Zoo," seen there in a declassified aerial photograph during the period of August 1967 to August 1968, where 19 of our courageous servicemen were psychologically tortured, some brutally beaten by interrogators assessed to be Cuban agents working under orders from Hanoi.

Described by some to be a psychological experiment, the goals of the "Cuba Program," as the torture project has been labeled by our Defense Department and our intelligence agencies, has been described in different ways as an attempt to test interrogation methods, to obtain absolute compliance and submission to captor demands, and ultimately to be used as propaganda by the international Communist effort, as Mike Benge will elaborate upon during today's session.

Some POW's were tortured and then instructed to copy a series of questions and answers given to them by their interrogators. These excerpts on most occasions included statements declaring that the United States was waging an illegal, immoral, and unjust war.

Prisoners were tortured—again, some psychologically, others physically—to ensure cooperation in appearances they were forced to make before visiting delegations. Refusal to comply with the captor's demands usually meant that "Fidel," "Chico," and "Pancho"—as the torturers were called by our POW's—would be called in for more intense beatings of the prisoners.

In a chapter of "P.O.W.," a book published by Reader's Digest Press in 1976, Colonel Bomar describes different incidents where attempts were made to break the prisoners so they would recite the Communist Vietnam script before visiting groups.

One of these occurred on July 3, 1968, when the camp medic entered the cell of Air Force Major James Kasler to bandage his draining leg. Having defied the camp commander the day before, telling him he would not tow the line before a delegation which as to visit "The Zoo," Kasler knew that this visit meant that it was done, as he says, prior to torture to keep the blood and the pus from staining the interrogation room.

Within an hour he was in torture. Enter "Fidel." "Fidel" reached down, grabbed Jim by the neck of his shirt, and shook him like a rag doll. "Fidel" seemed beside himself with rage. Then he slammed the heel of his boot down in the center of Kasler's chest. Jim gasped, fought for air.

Kasler would not cooperate, and after a while, "Fidel" shifted psychological gears, offering a drink of water, a cigarette, turning a small table fan on Kasler. Unable to get him to surrender, "Fidel" administered another beating, and another and another. Jim's thumbs were wired together describes Bomar, ropes were tied around his elbows. The flogging went on and on. After 36 lashes Kasler's lower back and legs hung in shreds. This skin had been entirely whipped away and the area was a bluish, purplish, greenish mass of bloody raw meat.

Unable to get Kasler to surrender, "Fidel" promised to return the next day for more.

The ruthless nature of the interrogators and the severity of their actions led prisoners such as Captain Raymond Vohden and Colonel Jack Bomar, as well as Lieutenant Carpenter, who is in the audience today, to question how human beings could so batter another human being. They stood firm in the face of unrestrained brutality, intimidation, and humiliation 30 years ago.

They are demonstrating their courage here again today by working with us to ensure that the sacrifices made in defense of freedom and democracy are not forgotten; to ensure that the life and death of one of their fellow POW's and victims of the "Cuba Program," Air Force pilot Earl Cobeil, who is pictured in one of the posters there, is not ignored; to ensure that justice is indeed served.

Captain Vohden and Colonel Bomar will offer compelling and detailed testimony describing the actions committed against them by Cuban agents at "The Zoo," acts which are in direct violation of the

Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War. To violate the provisions enshrined in this document runs against the grain of civilized society and undermines the integrity of our international community as a whole. Humanity is one; when one suffers, we all suffer. Violations of this protocol are not just crimes against one individual, but against all of humanity.

That is the message that one of our witnesses, Andres Garcia, of my congressional district, a Vietnam veteran and the Vice President of the Cuban American Veterans Association, will underscore today.

Survivors of the "Cuba Program" have been eager to identify and trace the Cuba agents who systematically interrogated them and tortured their fellow Americans. Yet despite their efforts, a successful resolution of this matter has not been achieved. This hearing is the first of many steps aimed at changing that outcome.

We hope to accomplish three goals today. The first is to get leads that could take us closer to an identification of the Cuban torturers. Could "Fidel" be Fernando Vecino Alegret, or is he Luis Perez Jaen, as a 1974 CIA report alleged? Is "Chico" a man by the name of Veiga, as our intelligence agencies suggested in this same document? Is Gustavo Robreno Dolz the man our POW's called "Pancho?" The answer to these should be our first priority.

Our second goal is to provide the basis for an ensuing interagency investigation of new evidence, including a search of pertinent data and sources previously unavailable under Cold War parameters. We are fully cognizant of the mission of DOD's Office of POW/Missing Personnel who will be testifying today, and while they are most familiar with the "Cuba Program," they have completed their mission successfully by accounting for and bringing back all 20 of our servicemen who were part of the "Cuba Program." We want the State Department, CIA, FBI, INS, and the Defense Intelligence Agency to coordinate the comprehensive approach to this case.

Last, this hearing will begin to establish the foundation for future action against the torturers.

On a broader scale, this investigation will serve to highlight the brutal nature of the Castro regime and the historic and ongoing threat it poses to the American people. Ultimately, our hope is that this hearing will serve to honor those POW's who were willing to give life and limb so that we may all be free.

Mr. Chairman, as part of our preliminary investigation on this issue, I requested information from INS, FBI, and the Vietnamese Government through our embassy in Hanoi. I ask that these letters be included in the record of today's proceedings.

Chairman GILMAN. Without objection.

Mr. ROS-LEHTINEN. Just this morning I received a letter from Ambassador Peterson in Hanoi which I would like also to be included in the record.

Chairman GILMAN. Without objection.

[The letters appears in the appendix.]

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. In the letter he states, "I have personally presented your request to the appropriate Vietnamese officials." He further states that, "Given my personal experience, I share and

deeply appreciate your abhorrence for the inhumane treatment of POW's by any country."

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership.

Chairman GILMAN. Thank you, Chair lady Ros-Lehtinen.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Ros-Lehtinen appears in the appendix.]

Chairman GILMAN. Mr. Menendez.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me, at the outset, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving your attention to this issue in the crowded agenda of the Committee's schedule and for agreeing to hold a hearing before the Committee.

Let me also recognize the leadership of my colleague from Florida, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, for pursuing what others would clearly want to have be a closed door on a sad chapter in our relationships. Let me salute all of those whose testimony today will relive some painful memories, but whom we appreciate in our effort to ultimately get to the truth.

While it has been more than 30 years since the "Cuba Program" ended for the 19 American POW's who suffered the daily beatings and interrogations of their Cuban torturers, the "Cuba Program" remains for them a vivid memory, and for some, an everyday nightmare.

Today, we are here to announce that the search for "Fidel," "Chico," and "Pancho" Garcia is not over. The atrocities committed by these Cuban agents constitute clear violations of the Geneva Convention, which has no statute of limitations. It is our intent to reinvigorate the investigation, uncover the identities of these men and bring them to trial for their crimes.

I have read the information provided by the Department of Defense, which provides detailed accounts of the Cuban program. Unfortunately, the Department has been unable to definitively identify the Cuban perpetrators, but I believe our search does not end here. The clues we need to positively identify the three Cuban torturers may very well lie in the further review and declassification of documents from that time period, which I will join my colleague in pursuing.

We have encouraged the Department to renew its effort so that we can find these men before it is too late to bring them to trial or too late for their victims to see them brought to justice. We should also fully investigate Fernando Vecino Alegret, the man identified by retired Air Force Colonel Ed Hubbard as "Fidel." It seems quite feasible that the man who has claimed to be Cuba's Minister of Higher Education for more than 20 years was part of the "Cuba Program." Alegret's contention that he doesn't, "have the face of a torturer" is hardly a satisfactory response.

The allegation against Vecino Alegret is not a recent one. A *Washington Post* article of March 5, 1981, indicates that not only did he take part in the "Cuba Program," but that he was one of the most-watched people in Latin America by U.S. Intelligence services. He has been linked to Cuba's Cold War activities in Central America and Africa and served as Cuba's military attache to Vietnam during the time of the "Cuba Program."

Now, personally, I can't tell you that he is "Fidel," but certainly his past should tell us that he is not above scrutiny. As former

Chilean Dictator Pinochet has discovered, the passage of years has increased, not decreased, the likelihood of prosecution in cases involving violations of international law.

I welcome that reality. I would hate to think that in the world we would send the message that those who think that through the passage of time they can escape the violations of international law and the consequences that one should receive for those violations. That would send a very wrong message.

Castro's tyranny continues today in Cuba, not against American POW's, but against his own people. Pinochet's trial sends a message to all individuals who violate human rights that they, too, can and will be held accountable for their crimes.

I look forward to the testimony. I will be going back and forth, Mr. Chairman. I have a hearing across the hall, unfortunately, at the same time. But I have read the testimony that has been submitted to the Committee. I think it is rather compelling and gives us a strong foundation to move forward in the future, and I thank you.

Chairman GILMAN. We will now proceed with the statement of Mr. Rohrabacher.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I will be very quick, because I know Mr. Cooksey wants to get right to the testimony, and so I do.

Let me just say that Ileana has done a terrific job here. We all owe her a debt of gratitude. It is about time we set the record straight about Fidel Castro; and there are just so many misconceptions and so many false images created about this monster. I mean, Fidel Castro is portrayed by so many on the left as being some nationalist just opposed to American domination, but you take a look at the picture a little closer and you are going to find that that man is a ghoul.

He is a criminal, he is the worst type of gangster and ran a gangster regime for all these years in Cuba. He was, from the very beginning, a fanatic Communist who put his own people, thousands of them, in harm's way throughout the world, as cannon fodder for the Communist movement in Africa; and he sent his people—he hated the United States so much that he sent his people over to torture Americans in Vietnam. We need to know these facts.

I am very pleased that you are here with us today to alert the American people about Fidel Castro—that his past crimes shouldn't be just sloughed off and taken lightly. This man is as evil a war criminal and is as committed to crimes against humanity as have ever been committed in this century. We need to remember that and make sure we put it on the record.

So thank you for helping set the record straight and being with us today.

Chairman GILMAN. Thank you, Mr. Rohrabacher.

We will now proceed with testimony from our witnesses.

Chairman GILMAN. United States Air Force Colonel Jack Bomar was born in Michigan in 1926. After refusing a transplant to correct a kidney disorder, Colonel Bomar was grounded, but was later granted a waiver at his request and assigned to the 41st Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron in Thailand. Colonel Bomar was shot down over North Vietnam on February 4, 1967. During his cap-

tivity, Colonel Bomar was tortured by the Cuban known as "Fidel." Colonel Bomar retired from the Air Force in 1974.

Colonel Bomar, you may proceed with your testimony. We will put your full statement in the record and you may summarize, whichever you deem appropriate.

STATEMENT OF COLONEL JACK BOMAR, UNITED STATES AIR FORCE, RETIRED

Mr. BOMAR. Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee. My testimony is a summary of a lengthier, more detailed statement.

Chairman GILMAN. Do you want to put the full statement in the record at this time?

Mr. BOMAR. I ask that it be included in its entirety in the record.

Chairman GILMAN. Without objection. Please proceed.

Mr. BOMAR. Good morning. My name is Jack Bomar, retired Air Force Colonel. I am a graduate of the "Fidel" Program, Class of 1968. I wish to thank the Members of this panel for their interest in uncovering the truth about a subject that has been buried for 31 years—especially you, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen from Florida.

When I was shot down in 1967, we were flying an ECM aircraft out of Takhli, Thailand. It is kind of amazing that a SAM suppression aircraft can get knocked down by a SAM. But that is what happened. There were six of us on the aircraft; three of us survived. One was captured by the Chinese and turned over to the North Vietnamese. I went through the initial torture of peasants on the ground trying to spear me with spears as I came toward the ground. I kicked one of them aside and in doing that, I think I ruptured a disc in my back, and broke an ankle. I got a big chunk of shrapnel through my left leg before bailing out. So when I arrived in North Vietnam, I was not in the mood for games. I was tired, I just wanted a drink of water and to be allowed to lay down. The peasants tortured me all day.

Finally I got into Hanoi that night, and went into some real torture by the North Vietnamese.

They didn't need our "Fidel" to teach them how to torture people. The Vietnamese were experts at this. I went through what we call the "Rope Trick." Your arms are tied behind your back, wrists in manacles and the pressure is slowly applied to the upper arms with straps. Eventually I was hung from a hook because I would not reveal the names of my crew.

Finally after three days with no food or water, constant interrogation, the camp commander was suddenly there, then gone. The torture guy—we call him "Straps and Bars"—applied the pressure again. Finally, they showed me a list of my crew members, so they had been working on one of the other three of us pretty harshly.

I was sent to "The Zoo" and put in a camp where I met a delegation from the United States. There were three men in this delegation. One was a doctor, I think from France, one was a lawyer from Denmark or someplace, and the other was an anti war type from Berkeley, California, named Neilands, a professor from Berkeley. He and I immediately hit it off by him sticking out his hand—I was on crutches, had bandages from here to here to cover up all the wounds on my hands. I asked him, "What the hell are you doing in North Vietnam?" He said, "Dean Rusk, the son of a bitch, will

not tell me where I can go and when I can be there." So my purpose, primarily, was to get a letter to my family, which got my name out in public. We felt that if you were known to be a POW, your survival chances were much greater than those that were not known.

After that interrogation, I was tortured several more times by the Vietnamese and thrown into solitary. I was in solitary confinement in June. After the delegation visit, there was no more treatment for the hole in my leg. I dug the shrapnel out with my fingers. I was on crutches when I saw the delegation; but now the crutches were long gone. Because of my attitude at the delegation, I was stashed in solitary.

Suddenly they came in and wanted me to meet "several of my countrymen". I think they said, "When you go to Quiz at night, it is a pretty scary thing; you are not sure what is coming." I wasn't sure when I walked in the room with Dum Dum and there were two Caucasians sitting at this table, and the one in the center was quite tall, spoke good English, had a Latin accent, offered me a cigarette, which I refused; and then I took it after a few words of encouragement from him. On his side was another gentleman—smaller, lighter hair, I believe—and they said, "Where do you think we are from?" I said "I think you are from Romania." It was obvious that they were Latin Americans. He said he was there to help me with my defense. I was to be tried by the war crimes tribunal, the Bertrand Russell Tribunal for War Crimes against the Vietnamese people, and he would work on my defense for me. Then he sent me back to the room.

I didn't know what to make of these two guys, but they weren't the normal delegation like the one I had just seen. They were a little scarier; they were a little more intense. They were sitting with the camp commander to his right, which is a position of authority. I was called back a couple of days later after he told me now we must fill out a sheet of paper and you will describe your aircraft, 20 pages written there. I left it lying on my bunk. Being in solitary, I had a bunk there, a platform of boards, and I left it blank. Finally, at the last minute, I scratched in a crude sketch of the aircraft. This is a wing, this is a window, this is a door—this is the top, this is the bottom, pure nonsense. The next day I gathered up my stuff, and I met with two other POW's.

Ray Vohden was one of them, on crutches. He was badly hurt; he had also met "Fidel." The other one was a gentleman named Dave Duart; I think he was an Air Force captain flying a 105. There we sat in this room looking at each other, wondering, what is going on here. Ray Vohden made the—I will not repeat the statement he made, but it was, I think, that we are in deep you-know-what. and we were.

We were in that position maybe three or four weeks. We would go to Quiz, he would threaten us; "Fidel" would threaten us. His entire program to me, I felt was, you will surrender. He didn't say surrender to what, he didn't say what he wanted you to do, he said surrender. I think he was running a surrender program up there and could get maybe 10 or 15 POW's to surrender to anything that came up. That's a bad position to be in.

I was badly tortured by him when I refused to surrender, or as he said, choose the match box or choose the cigarette case. The match box I chose and went through the straps again. It was just as bad the second time with the manacles that tore up my hands. I was just off crutches, I didn't walk that well right then. So he got my attention after a guard came running toward me and grabbed me by the throat and tried to crush my windpipe. That got my attention.

So I nodded, "I surrender." There was some histrionics of knocking me around the room, and I was sent back to solitary confinement with some leg irons. We were finally joined in a large group, either nine or ten POW's, and some of them are right here. Jim Kasler was not in our group, as such.

I felt that we were being held in limbo there. He would threaten us. He would send us to Quiz. We would go back there, back and forth. He sounded like a Cuban revolutionary to me—Che Guevara. I made a big mistake one day; when Che Guevara died, I said something like "Good riddance"—really a bright statement at the time—and that got me in real big trouble, as if I could get in any more.

We were joined eventually by a fellow prisoner, Earl Cobeil. Cobeil was a complete physical disaster when we saw him. He had been tortured for days and days and days. I went down to clean him up. When "Fidel" dragged us down there, he said, Clean him up; and if anything happens to this man you, Bomar, are responsible. Then he hit him right in the face, knocked him down again.

His hands were almost severed from the manacles. He had bamboo in his shins. All kinds of welts up and down all over; his face was bloody. He was a complete mess. They brought him into the room and as far as we could tell, Captain Cobeil was totally mentally out of it. He did not know where he was. I don't think he knew where he had been or where he was going. He was just there.

"Fidel" began to beat him with a fan belt. I call it a fan belt but it wasn't really a fan belt. I think it was the side of a Russian truck tire, a very, very painful experience to be hit by this length of fan belt. I saw Cobeil hit as many as 12 or 13 times directly in the face. He never blinked his eyes. He never opened his mouth. He just stood there.

We had him in our cell for I would say 8 months or so. He refused to eat. He refused to bow to the guards. You must understand when the door opened, the guards demanded you will bow, all criminals will bow. We were always a criminal in North Vietnam. We were never a POW. We were governed by the camp regulations, not the U.S. code of conduct for military personnel.

We took care of Cobeil for about a year. We force-fed him by holding him down, putting a stick in his mouth, and pushing the food down his throat. In all that time he never recognized anything that was going on. Finally he was removed from the room for electrical shock treatments, and then finally was gone. I understand he died a couple of years later there at the Hanoi Hilton.

I don't believe "Fidel" was in Hanoi just to torture American POW's. I think that events controlled him that he had no control over. I think the Tet Offensive of 1968 was involved. I think when Johnson halted the bombing in 1968, that involved what "Fidel"

was doing up there. I believe a conference that was taking place in Hanoi—Havana in 1968 had something to do with "Fidel" being up there. I think we were being prepared for some selective release that would enhance the Vietnam image of lenient and humane treatment worldwide. We were almost waiting for something to trigger this release.

"Fidel" used torture not for direct propaganda or anti war statement as the Vietnamese did. He used torture to break us initially, and to control us and keep us right under his thumb so we would do what he wanted done. His brutal torture of Cobeil and Kasler was due mostly to his frustration and his inability to force his will on others.

When he lost his temper, he was a complete madman. He would get red in the face; he just exploded with rage. So if you refused to bow to him like Cobeil refused to do or if I refused to take the cigarette case instead of the deal, his temper just went out of control.

The North Vietnamese knew exactly what "Fidel" was doing up there. They may tell you that he was there to teach English to the guards. I don't think that had any part in it whatsoever. He was allowed to do to Cobeil, Kasler and others what was unjustifiable in any society, even a Communist society.

Perhaps one day we will positively identify and locate this man. Thank you.

Chairman GILMAN. Thank you very much, Colonel Bomar.

[The prepared statement of Colonel Bomar appears in the appendix.]

Chairman GILMAN. Our next witness is Captain Raymond Vohden. Captain Vohden was shot down over Vietnam. He was held as a prisoner of war from April, 1965 through February 12, 1973. During his captivity, he was tortured by the Cuban known as "Fidel." From 1975 to 1978, he served as a principal adviser to the Secretary of Defense on POW/MIA matters.

Captain, you may put your full statement in the record or summarize, whichever you may deem appropriate. Please proceed.

Mr. CHABOT. Excuse me, Mr. Chairman. There is a vote on the floor.

Chairman GILMAN. We are going to continue. Mr. Rohrabacher has gone over; he'll come back and preside while we go over to vote. Please do it quickly if you are going over, because we have so many witnesses we want to hear.

Chairman GILMAN. Please proceed, Captain Vohden.

STATEMENT OF CAPTAIN RAYMOND VOHDEN, UNITED STATES NAVY, RETIRED

Mr. VOHDEN. Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, my testimony is a summary of a lengthier, more detailed statement. I ask that it be included in its entirety in the record.

Chairman GILMAN. Without objection.

Mr. VOHDEN. In August 1964, I was assigned to Attack Squadron 216 as the operations officer flying in the A4C Skyhawk off the *USS Hancock*. Our carrier was in the South China Sea in early 1965 when the war against North Vietnam began to escalate.

On my fifth mission, I was shot down bombing a bridge in North Vietnam. I broke both bones above the ankle when I landed. I was then taken to the camp known as the Hanoi Hilton, where I was in complete solitary and was never moved off a wooden board for four months except to go to the hospital for two hours one night.

For the next 2½ years I was moved from camp to camp, until being sent to "The Zoo" in November 1965. In the early part of 1967, September 1967, I was looking forward to the end of the war and my homecoming, when one night I was taken to an interrogation. To my astonishment, the man sitting across from me was a Caucasian. One of the Vietnamese camp officers sat next to him. We talked about the war for the next half hour. He had an excellent command of English and appeared to be very knowledgeable about the U.S. and the war.

Several days later, I was moved to another room with Jack Bomar and another Air Force officer. They both had recently been shot down and had also talked to the Caucasian. One of us named him "Fidel" because we guessed he might be Cuban. Individually, we met with him daily. The war was essentially the main topic.

One day I was taken to Quiz. "The Elf," one of the other Vietnamese officers, was there. The Elf asked me four or five times, what orders did I give. I said, none. He left and came back with six or seven guards who forced me onto floor, put manacles on my wrists behind me and strapped my elbows together behind me. After some time he finally gave me a clue what the order was, it was about throwing food away. I had ordered—I was an SRO in a building one time before, and I told the guys to throw away some food because some of the younger people didn't get enough, so they thought it would be better if we didn't turn back food.

Five minutes later, as they were taking the manacles and straps off, the door burst open. In comes "Fidel," ranting and raving like a madman, pointing his finger at me and telling me that I better have a good attitude now and do everything he says. He slapped me 10 or 15 times. I then had to write on a piece of notebook paper that I surrendered to the Vietnamese people and would do everything they wanted me to do. He told me other things to write and then told me to sign it and then eat it to prove I would do everything he told me to do. Eating paper is interesting.

I went back to the room with Bomar, but Bomar and Duart were gone. For the next two weeks, I was beaten 3 or 4 times a day until I became demoralized and depressed and started to lose my appetite. I finally gave up eating anything. After failing to eat several meals, "Fidel" came in yelling and screaming at me that I was trying to cheat him again and that he would kill me if I didn't eat. I had reached bottom. I didn't care if I lived or died. "Fidel" just stood there and watched. Without a word, he left.

A week later, the tactic shifted; the treatment improved. "Fidel" responded if we didn't use what he gave us we would be very sorry. One by one, more POW's joined us; all had been forced to surrender. At Quiz, "Fidel" tried every argument in the book to convince us that the U.S. was wrong in its war of aggression. Every day he reminded us not to become reactionary or we would suffer.

One morning in early 1968, one of the camp officers came to the outside of our room and disconnected the wires to our speaker.

Later that day we heard from guys in another building who had heard the radio program that the first three U.S. prisoners had been released by the Vietnamese. I felt very relieved and proud of myself and the others who served with me in the "Fidel" program because, although I can't say for sure what the original purpose of Fidel's presence was, I believe, the way the program was run, that its purpose was to find someone who could be of value to the North Vietnamese if released. Some found it hard to believe that "Fidel" expected us to adopt the enemy views on the war and talk about good treatment after we were tortured and forced to surrender; but after getting to know "Fidel," I could see how this was his goal and how he believed it was possible.

After "Fidel" failed in having any of his group released, the "Cuba Program" continued without any real purpose or meaning. Two weeks later I moved to another room with Paul Schultz. I rarely saw "Fidel" again, except on one or two occasions. "Fidel" had been working with some other men and it appeared that one of them, Earl Cobeil, was resisting "Fidel" to the maximum. Of course, "Fidel" was retaliating. Several days after I was moved, Earl Cobeil was moved in with Don Waltman into the room next to mine. Waltman said Earl was all mixed up in his mind.

On one occasion, one of the guards, Grimsey, came to the shower area and took us back to our room. "Fidel" was standing at the door. All three of us lined up. I had moved into this room with Waltman and Cobeil. We went to the shower, then we came back. So Waltman and I bowed, but Cobeil just stood there again. I said, "Hey, Cobeil, bow." Nothing happened. Suddenly Grimsey raised his leg and pushed his foot against Cobeil's body, who went tumbling over toward the back of the room. "Fidel" yelled loudly at Cobeil to stop cheating him or he would teach him a lesson he would never forget. The door closed.

After having seen "Fidel" for almost every day for six months, I knew that "Fidel" was going to get his way. He was not going to let the Vietnamese see him fail in any endeavor. I was convinced that he would take a man to any length to get what he wanted. In addition, the difference between the Vietnamese and "Fidel" was that more or less once the Vietnamese got what they wanted they let up at least for awhile. Not so with "Fidel." There wasn't a day that went by that there weren't threats or warnings to all of us.

I was in this room with Cobeil and Waltman now; and for the rest of the quiet hour, Waltman and I tried everything imaginable to get Cobeil to come down to earth, but we were unsuccessful. Shortly after the gong sounded ending the quiet hour, "Fidel" came to the door and told me to come outside. "Fidel" asked me if Cobeil was squared away. I told him that in my honest opinion, Cobeil was not at all rational; if he continued working Cobeil over, Cobeil would never make it. I was hopeful that he would believe me about Cobeil.

He accused me of trying to help Cobeil cheat him. The door was closed, locked, and bolted. I started to talk to Cobeil again for a few minutes, when all of a sudden, "Fidel" jumped up in the window, holding the bars, screaming in his loud voice, "I caught you, I caught you cheating me." Seconds later the door slammed open. "Fidel" screamed to me, get out, get out. A few minutes later

"Fidel" returned with what looked like a fan belt of a car, but cut so it was like a whip. As "Fidel" passed by he looked at me with a glaze in his eyes of an enraged madman.

"Fidel" went in after Cobeil with Grimsey and Cedric. I could hear the thud of the belt against Cobeil's body again and again as "Fidel" screamed. I guess Cobeil was hit around 20 or 30 times.

It was hard to listen, as I did, to "Fidel" beating Cobeil, a frail, diminutive man, his wrists swollen three times the normal size, a vacant stare in his eyes already pushed by torture beyond the limit for which he might have a chance to regain his sanity. It had been far easier for me to endure the straps than to have to go through this.

The guards all stood around talking loudly, laughing and yelling in Vietnamese. When I saw "Fidel" with the fan belt, I was surprised, because up to that time I had never heard of anyone getting hit like that. As I stood there with my crutches, my heart and mind overflowed with emotion. It was the most sickening feeling to hear what was going on and know there was nothing I could do about it.

That was the last day I saw Cobeil. "Fidel" unmercifully beat a mentally defenseless, sick man to death. He, as well as the North Vietnamese Communists, must bear full responsibility for that and other acts.

There have been considerable efforts to locate "Fidel" in Cuba, but without success. I have often wondered what we would do if we found him. Try him as a war criminal?

No mention was ever made to try the North Vietnamese leaders as criminals. Thus, I question whether trying to locate "Fidel" would be a wasted effort. Maybe this hearing and the interest shown by Congressman Gilman and Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen to investigate will mean some justice will be served.

[The prepared statement of Captain Vohden appears in the appendix.]

Mr. COOKSEY. [Presiding.] Thank you, Captain, that was very moving testimony, and I appreciate your remarks.

Mr. Benge, you are going to be the next witness. I am sitting in because I am going to skip this vote. To me, your testimony is more important than voting on the Journal. You will notice, as long as I am here, there is no time limit. We have a lot of politicians that need a time limit, but you men are heroes and you can testify as long as you want.

STATEMENT OF MIKE BENGE, FORMER POW AND POW HISTORIAN

Mr. BENGE. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, Madam Chair Lady, Members of the Committee, fellow former POW's, our Cuban friends and distinguished guests. My testimony is a summary of a lengthy, more detailed statement that I am presenting here today, and also of my research report and references on the "Cuba Program." I ask that these be included in their entirety in the record.

Mr. COOKSEY. So ordered.

Mr. BENGE. My name is Michael Benge, and while serving as a civilian economic development officer in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam, I was captured by the North Vietnamese during

the Tet Offensive on January 28, 1968. I was held in numerous camps in South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam. I was a POW for over five years spent 27 months in solitary confinement, one year in a black box, and 1 year in a cage in Cambodia.

I served for over 11 years in Vietnam. I was released during Operation Homecoming in 1973.

I am a board member of the National Alliance of Families for the Return of America's Missing Servicemen, and I am a POW activist; that is, I am one who is actively seeking the truth regarding the fate of our prisoners of war and missing in action.

I was not tortured by the Cubans nor was I part of the "Cuba Program." There were 19 American POW's that I know of who were tortured by the Cubans in Hanoi during the Vietnam War. These brave men include Colonel Bomar, Captain Ray Vohden, and Commander Al Carpenter, who is in the audience. They named the torturers "Fidel," "Chico," and "Pancho." The torture took place in "The Zoo". It was run by a Vietnamese camp commander call "The Lump." He was called that because of the presence of a large fatty tumor in the middle of his forehead.

I was not tortured by the Cubans in Vietnam, but I was interrogated by The Lump and a person who appeared to be a Latino who spoke a few words of Spanish to The Lump during my interrogation in the early part of 1970. Upon my return to the U.S., I was shown a picture taken in Cuba of The Lump, which was taken with an American anti war group. Yes, it was the same one who had interrogated me in 1970.

I was told by a congressional investigator that he was the man who was in charge of funneling Soviet KGB money to the American anti war groups and activists, such as Jane Fonda. After researching my paper, this made more sense, for who would be better suited to liaison with the Cubans then The Lump? This was my first piece of the puzzle.

I decided to research the "Cuba Program" after repeated claims by the Administration, Senators John McCain and John Kerry, Ambassador Pete Peterson and members of the Department of Defense that the Vietnamese Government was cooperating fully in resolving the POW/MIA issue. This is far from the truth. If the Vietnamese Communists were fully cooperating, as purported, they would have told us the true fate of the 173 U.S. servicemen who are still missing, who were last known to be alive and in the hands of North Vietnamese Communists. They would have helped us resolve the fate of over 600 American servicemen who were lost in Laos, of which over 80 percent were lost in areas totally under the control of the North Vietnamese. If the Vietnamese were fully cooperating, we would not be here today, for they would have revealed the names of the Cubans—"Fidel", "Chico," and "Pancho"—who were responsible for the torture of 19 POW's, beating one so severely that it resulted in his death.

Upon their return to the U.S., the POW's were told by the U.S. Government not to talk about the "Cuba Program." Some of them resisted as they had resisted "Fidel", and they broke silence. Regardless, the "Cuba Program" was swept under the rug by the U.S. Government. I began researching the "Cuba Program" and had a

draft paper in 1996 for presentation at the annual meeting of the National Alliance of Families.

After this, former Congressman Bob Dornan held hearings on it, and it forced the Department of Defense's Office for POW/MIA Affairs to do an analysis and a compilation which was submitted to Congress. I reassessed the information in the DPMO compilation and, nevertheless, from my reading the documents in this compilation, I found a profile. Regardless of what was testified, I read through these documents and I found the profile of a man that seemed to match almost perfectly the POW's description of the Cuban called "Chico." However, this profile also partially fit the POW's characterization of "Fidel." The profile was that of Major Fernando Vecino Alegret.

Last August 22nd, the *Miami Herald* published an article on the "Cuba Program," based partially on my report; however, it was misreported that I had identified a man named Raul Valdes Vivo as "Fidel." That was wrong. However, it produced out of the Cuban exile community a photograph and a report that indeed the man who was suspected to be "Fidel" was Alegret.

Alegret is now Cuba's Minister of Education, and Fidel Castro has issued a denial that Alegret was ever in Vietnam. However, there was evidence compiled by the DIA, documented and the report submitted to Congress, that he was in Vietnam.

Mr. Bob Destatte of the DPMO office made this report to Congress. However, he says that he was not responsible for the analysis of the "Cuba Program;" and I find it very hard, after reading this evidence, which was very poorly analyzed, that the Administration, Department of Defense, the POW/Missing Personnel Office have mastered the art of obfuscation.

I grew up on a farm in the West, and I used to try to catch greased pigs at the county fair; and I can assure you that trying to pin down DPMO to truthful facts oftentimes is much more difficult than catching a greased pig.

Mr. Destatte testified to DPMO's conclusions that the "Cuba Program" was nothing more than a plan to provide instruction in basic English to the North Vietnamese army personnel working with American prison POW's. I have taught English to the Vietnamese, and I have been tortured by the Vietnamese, and I can tell the difference between the two. One might conclude from Mr. Destatte's testimony that neither he nor his associate, Mr. Tarabochia, knew the difference between torture and teaching English. I can also read English and understand what I read. From reading that report, it is very evident that the profile fits Alegret, and that perhaps they could take some English lessons from the Cubans.

Mr. Destatte had the audacity to testify that the high command was unaware that the Cubans were torturing American POW's. I find this incomprehensible. I ask, how did Mr. Destatte reach this conclusion? He questioned a North Vietnamese colonel, Colonel Pham Teo, who told Destatte that he was in South Vietnam in 1967 and 1968 during the Cuban torture program. He knew nothing of the "Cuba Program;" however, he had heard rumors that it was an English language instruction program that had gone awry.

Mr. Destatte testified that the Vietnamese explanation is fully consistent with what we know about the conduct of the Cubans. I find this deplorable.

Mr. Destatte chose to believe a Vietnamese Communist colonel over American POW's who were tortured by the Cubans. I find this incomprehensible. What bewilders me, as it should you, is that Destatte's superiors at DPMO had the audacity to let him testify before Congress to this foolishness. This exemplifies the quality of DPMO's investigation and analysis of the "Cuba Program."

My analysis, from what I read over and from what was very evident within the documentation provided by DPMO to Congress, was that it was a program to gain the complete submission of American POW's, and it was in preparation for an October 18 to 21, 1968, Communist International Second Symposium Against Yankee Genocide in Vietnam, held in Cuba. This symposium was in continuum of the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal, a kangaroo court and dog-and-pony show held in Denmark the previous year.

My research paper is based partially on what DPMO gave to Congress, as well as other documents I have obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. However, I just scratched the surface, but I have found enough documents to indicate that there should be a plethora of other documents related to the Cuban involvement in Vietnam if they were ever declassified, as two U.S. Presidents have decreed. I also recommend that this matter be thoroughly investigated by professional investigators, not DPMO analysts.

I shall end this up shortly.

The Cubans were very heavily involved in Vietnam. They maintained a whole section of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, where many American POW's were lost. I have also uncovered evidence of the possibility that American POW's from the Vietnam War have been held in Los Maristas, a secret Cuban prison run by Castro's G–2 intelligence service. The Cubans who claimed to have seen them, later escaped, made it to the U.S. and were debriefed by the FBI. At the FBI, when I requested documents to be released, I got an answer of "Give me their birthdays."

My paper raises more questions than it answers, but only history will prove me right or wrong. However, I think I am on the right track. Only through full disclosure will we ever know the truth. I was brought up with old-fashioned values. My mother taught me at a young age that no matter how hard you search for the truth, you won't find it, no matter what, unless you really want to.

I end up concluding with there remarks: ignorance, arrogance, disinterest, lack of caring, incompetence, obfuscation. I rest my case.

Mr. COOKSEY. Thank you, Mr. Benge.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Benge appears in the appendix.]

Mr. COOKSEY. Mr. Garcia. I understand you are a Vietnam veteran, but not a POW; is that correct?

STATEMENT OF ANDRES F. GARCIA, VICE PRESIDENT, CUBAN AMERICAN VETERANS ASSOCIATION

Mr. GARCIA. I am a Vietnam veteran, sir, not a POW.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, my testimony is a summary of my lengthier statement, and I would like it to be included in the record in its entirety.

Mr. COOKSEY. Without objection.

Mr. GARCIA. I would also like to have in the record a letter from the Paralyzed Veterans Association of Florida supporting these hearings.

Mr. COOKSEY. Without objection, it will be part of the permanent record.

[The information referred to appears in the appendix.]

Mr. GARCIA. Chairman Gilman, Members of the House International Relations Committee, ladies and gentlemen. It is a privilege to participate in these hearings.

Let me begin by thanking you and the Members of your Committee for your efforts to learn what happened to our POW's during the Cuban Program, under which 20 Americans in Cu Loc, the POW camp in North Vietnam, were tortured by agents of Fidel Castro's government, resulting in the tragic death of one of our POW's. My most sincere gratitude to Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen for her constant defense of veterans' rights and for her tireless efforts in uncovering the truth of the cruelty of Fidel Castro, not only against his own people, but also against the American people whom he hates with a passion, as demonstrated again and again by his actions throughout his life.

This time his involvement in atrocities committed against our servicemen cannot be left unpunished.

For the past 40 years Castro's Ministry of the Interior has utilized cruel methods of torture to break down those they consider enemies of the revolution. These same methods were used against 20 defenseless POW's in North Vietnam. My voice today is not the voice of a single veteran, who proudly served with the 82nd Airborne Division in Vietnam in 1968–1969 while I was still a Cuban refugee, but I am speaking for those Cuban-American men, like me, who do not have a voice today because they gave their lives fighting for freedom and justice with the U.S. Armed forces in Korea, Vietnam and Lebanon.

What a difference between the actions of these men and the actions of those monsters that tortured our POW's.

I am also speaking on behalf of a highly decorated Cuban-born Marine who served two tours in Vietnam and was killed by the same terrorist state that tortured our POW's. His name is Armando Alejandre, Jr. On February 24, 1996, Castro's air force shot down two U.S. unarmed civilian aircraft, killing Armando, two U.S.-born youngsters of Cuban descent and a legal U.S. resident.

Speaking on behalf of my organization, CAVA, we stand ready to work with any Federal agency that asks for our support in getting more information on the POW issue. With the communication we now have with dissidents on the island and a number of Castro's military residing in the U.S., it is possible for us to obtain much more information today than in past years.

We veterans will not allow this issue to fade away. We are committed to inform the American people of Castro's crimes again our servicemen, and we will mobilize the veterans at the national level if necessary. I am not only a member of CAVA but a member of

the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and the Vietnam Veterans of America, and I will seek their support.

Men in Congress, the press, some mayors, Governors and even the U.S. Chamber of Commerce believe we should be soft with Fidel Castro in order to change him. I propose that they ask Fidel Castro that, as a gesture of goodwill, he allow the alleged torturers to come to the United States to be questioned and to face their victims. If they have nothing to hide, Castro should cooperate.

The fact is that nothing has changed since 1967. Fidel Castro continues to be the worst enemy the U.S. ever had. He is a dagger pointing at the U.S. underbelly. Yes, he is capable—after having ordered the torture of POW's in Vietnam, he is capable of killing innocent children. He is capable of shooting down civilian unarmed airplanes carrying U.S. citizens. He is capable of using the drug trade to further undermine the U.S. and, yes, he is capable, willing, and able to perpetrate biological attack against the American people.

He is capable, and he will continue to plan further attacks against the U.S. with impunity because he has always gotten away with anything he does.

The time to stand firm is now. We should create a task force comprised of intelligence agencies to conduct a thorough investigation of the crimes against the POW's. But more important, we should indict and prosecute those found guilty, including Fidel Castro, who has all the responsibility.

Every time we have taken a weak stand, we have lost. Look at the Bay of Pigs, Vietnam, and Iran. When we have taken a stand from a position of strength, we have been victorious. Look at Grenada, Panama, Iraq, and Kosovo. We are the strongest power in the world and the world respects a leader.

The leaders of this great Nation must assume a very important responsibility. We pray to God that your actions will lead to America doing the just, the moral, the right thing, without giving up its political and commercial interest.

I do not want to close my testimony without trying to take care of a doubt you may have in your mind. Is this another reckless statement by a Cuban? I am a Cuban American. My parents sent me to this country when I was a teenager. I paid my dues in Vietnam; I am no longer a refugee, but a proud American citizen. My children were born here.

I love this country. I want nothing but the best for America. I am Cuban by birth and American by choice. I am very proud of both.

Thank you for this opportunity you have given me today and God bless you all.

Mr. COOKSEY. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Garcia appears in the appendix.]

Mr. COOKSEY. I want to thank all of you for your testimony. It is very important. It is a story that needs to be out there. Americans need to hear it, the world needs to hear it, and your testimony has been good.

I will open the questioning first with Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for this opportunity. I would like, before I ask the panelists my questions, to recognize Congressman Mark Foley, our colleague from Florida, who has been participating in the briefings that we have held and is very anxious for us to move this investigation.

Congressman Foley.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. MARK FOLEY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF FLORIDA

Mr. FOLEY. Let me thank my colleague for all of her leadership on this important issue.

More appalling than the fact that Fernando Vecino Alegret is now a high-ranking Cuban official is the fact that he has been able to visit our country. Our country should not be open to thugs like him. This is why I introduced, with Gary Ackerman and Bob Franks and supported by my colleague, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen, the Anti-Atrocity Alien Deportation Act, H.R. 3058, which would make all war criminals and perpetrators of atrocities, such as torture, excludable from the United States of America.

I didn't become aware of this problem of war criminals entering the United States until I recently learned that a key member of the brutal military dictatorship that ruled Haiti from 1991 to 1994 is now living comfortably in my congressional district. In fact, more bizarre, he is a winner of over $3 million in the Florida lottery. Brutalized his countrymen, came to America under the auspices of the State Department, and then wins the lottery and lives in a guarded, gate community in Port St. Lucie, Florida, unlike those that he beat and brutally assassinated and murdered; they didn't have that luxury of travel to the United States.

Initially, I just assumed it was a bizarre and isolated episode. However, once I began to look into the issue more, I realized how big a problem we have on our hands. According to the Center for Justice and Accountability in San Francisco, at least 60 alleged human rights violators are currently residing in the United States. These are just the ones who have been identified as living here; that is not even counting those who have been able to visit the U.S. on visas.

In 1998, Canada began an aggressive campaign to locate and keep out human rights abusers who attempt to enter their country. As of July 1999, the Canadian Government indicated that 400 cases are being processed toward removal, 307 suspected war criminals have been denied visas, 23 were deported. That is a total of 700 war criminals that Canada has detected. I applaud Canada for their pursuit of these people. I think it is fair to say that based on Canada's figures and taking into account the much bigger population in the U.S. and other socioeconomic factors, we could have as many as 7,000 human rights abusers either living in or visiting the United States at any given time.

We owe it to our brave veterans and refugees who have fled persecution abroad that they should not have to come face to face with their former tormentors in the Land of the Free. Canada has been successful in tracking down modern war criminals, and so can we.

If I may ask Mr. Garcia a quick question. Obviously, we are aware of the visit in the past, in 1979. Are you aware of any other visits Mr. Alegret has made to the United States subsequently?

Mr. GARCIA. No, sir. I am not aware of it.

Mr. FOLEY. Thank you. I appreciate my colleague yielding the time, and I hope the Chairman will give her some additional time since I took up her whole five minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for allowing Mr. Foley to speak. I think that the reason the Administration is not fully behind your bill is that then they would not be able to allow one of the biggest war criminals in the world today, Fidel Castro, entry into the United States. But we certainly hope that that bill passes.

I would like to thank the panelists for excellent testimony. I want to ask you about the debriefing that has been going on and the information shared and how much you have been a part of that. News sources and other official and unofficial sources have referred to the existence of a CIA document published in the early 1970's which provides an assessment of who the Agency believes could be "Fidel" and "Chico."

Were you, or to the best of your knowledge, were any of your fellow survivors of the "Cuba Program" ever shown this report, and were you debriefed by the CIA and other intelligence agencies?

Last in this set, what more could have been done by these entities, and do you believe that with their resources that they should have been able to more firmly identify these torturers?

Colonel Bomar.

Colonel BOMAR. I was not aware of being shown a report by the FBI, or whoever it was who did this, no.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Captain Vohden.

Captain VOHDEN. There may have been that report, but it is a long time ago now. I may have been shown it, but I just don't recall.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. In the debriefing process, sketches were made of the torturers; however, those varied, differing degrees, from one to another. What physical characteristics stand out about "Fidel" that could facilitate an identification?

Some of your colleagues have identified this person Fernando Vecino Alegret as "Fidel," or the man in the photo that is going to be shown to you—his name is Luis Perez Jaen—fits the description of "Fidel." What personality traits would you attribute to "Fidel" and the others?

Colonel Bomar.

Colonel BOMAR. Jaen, I would not recognize this as "Fidel" at all, no. My comment was, "was it taken from 30,000 feet over Cuba?" However, this photograph is the same as that one. I was shown this, or sent this, by Colonel Hubbard, this picture. My reaction was, it could have been, or maybe it couldn't have been. I wasn't 100 percent sure that this picture—I think probably because, is he 20 years old here? This is a long time before we met him, and he matured a lot.

However, there was another picture, Ray.

Captain VOHDEN. I don't know. Maybe that. That's all I have.

Colonel BOMAR. There was another one that he could very possibly have been. That was the closest that I have seen, but I don't have it right here. I think she showed it to me earlier.

Yes, this picture right here. This would have been as close as I have seen, right here. This man right here. That could be him, but I am not 100 percent sure.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. For the record, could you tell us who it is that you are talking about?

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. That would be Fernando.

Colonel BOMAR. The man in the center in this photograph.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. That was given to us by people close to Fernando Vecino Alegret. These are photos taken in Cuba, family photographs and social events that he attended.

Colonel BOMAR. Very young in this picture.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. He is pointing to a photograph of a social occasion that took place in Cuba where he seems to share those characteristics.

Now, getting back to my other question, unless Captain Vohden wants to weigh in on this——

Captain VOHDEN. I don't recognize this man as "Fidel" at all. The other pictures, in one picture here there is a shirt that he is wearing that is almost identical to the shirt that he wore when I first met him. I don't know what you call that shirt.

Identifying features of "Fidel": First, he was exceptionally tall for a Cuban; he is probably 6'2", 6'2–1/2", or something like that, which I think is unusual. He also spoke excellent English and he was very knowledgeable about the United States. So that would indicate he would have to have spent some time here in the United States. I had an impression that he was kind of comparable to Li'l Abner sometimes. He was a big, husky, robust sort of a man.

But so far as the pictures are concerned, they could be. This is probably as close as I have seen. I have seen the picture of Alegret when he was older, but that is not at all possible. But this here, it could be. That is all I know.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. After the initial debriefings, were you ever approached again about new information, new sketches, new photographs, on the torturers; and if so, by whom and what was the result of these followups?

Colonel BOMAR. No, I never was. We did some initial sketches then. That was the last I heard of it. It was over.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Is that true for you?

Captain VOHDEN. I saw sketches initially and there was a time, maybe eight or ten years ago, the FBI came to my house and asked if I would look at some pictures; and for about three days, I thumbed through photo albums and I never found a picture of "Fidel." Also, there was staff from a Senate Committee, a number of years back, who talked to me on a few occasions.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. When visiting delegations were allowed directly into the camp, were you taken outside to meet them? Do you recall seeing any outsiders in the camp? By "outsiders," I mean Vietnamese officials or non-Vietnamese officials, not stationed at the camp and folks from other countries, journalists, any visits that we could use to locate the participants in an attempt to gain information about the torturers and who they were?

How closed was "The Zoo" to others?

Colonel BOMAR. I believe I saw some Chinese in the camp. Obviously there were some Russians, but we never spoke with them. But other than one man that was working on some electrical box, the squawk box in our room—he was definitely a friend of "Fidel."

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Now you had said in your testimony that "Fidel" had had a position of authority in the camp based on where he was sitting, where he was standing. That would seem to indicate that the Vietnamese certainly knew who this individual and the others were. Do you believe that they could give us information to further clarify the identity?

Colonel BOMAR. I don't think there is any doubt in any mind that the North Vietnamese knew exactly who this was. He came to the camp in a staff car, a Russian car, driven by a Vietnamese officer. We had never seen that before. That is how he traveled.

He did not live in this camp. He came from off-camp somewhere. He came quite often, and it was always in a staff car. The camp commander, "Lump," rode a bicycle. That was the best they got; going up, there was the bicycle.

But he rode around in a chauffeured staff car, so he was not an ordinary visitor to the camp.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Just one last question, if I may. I know my time is up, Mr. Chairman.

What more do you think can be done by our agencies to get to the identities of these three torturers?

Captain VOHDEN. One thing, just for starters, they should try to get a picture of this Alegret now, or try to get something from 1968 somewhere around that period of time. That would be very helpful to really identify and nail him.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Colonel?

Colonel BOMAR. I would give Ambassador Pete Peterson a call and say, hey, ask the Vietnamese who this guy is, who he was. Maybe we will turn the aide back on if you tell us. I would put pressure on our Ambassador up there to put pressure on the Vietnamese, and I think Peterson could do that.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, gentlemen. Thank you for your excellent testimony. We will have some other followup questions for you at a later date.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. COOKSEY. Mr. Rohrabacher.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Colonel Bomar, is it "Fidel" who had his own car? Is that who we are talking about, the man who is responsible for torturing you American prisoners, and he had his own car that he was driven around in?

Colonel BOMAR. Yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Do you believe that if he was simply an English teacher he would have had his own car?

Colonel BOMAR. That is really hard to believe. No, I never did believe that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So anyone who is suggesting that this program with the Cubans was simply a program to teach English is ignoring facts, like the fact that "Fidel" was being driven around in his own staff car, correct?

Colonel BOMAR. Yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. It would have to be either an intentional ignoring of facts like that, or we are talking about a total idiot.

Colonel BOMAR. Yes, I agree.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I want to make this very clear. Because this information that he had his own staff car isn't just something, you know; it has to be known by other people as well, right, especially people who might have been looking into this issue?

Colonel BOMAR. Yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Do you think that as you just testified, the Vietnamese, of course, would have to know the name of the fellow that they issued the car to, right?

Colonel BOMAR. Absolutely.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So the relationship between the Vietnamese and these Cubans that you are describing was not a relationship where someone was simply there teaching them English, but it seemed like they were actually in a position of authority; was that not true?

Colonel BOMAR. Yes.

Captain VOHDEN. He was a high-ranking official from somewhere, and the Vietnamese gave him a lot of power to do what he did. He ran that whole show by himself. Because the Vietnamese knew what he did to Cobeil, and they just let him go ahead and do it. So this guy really had to have a lot of power to be able to do that, because I don't think the Vietnamese liked what happened to Cobeil.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Let's just say, for the record, having been in Vietnam several times since the war and once during the war, let me note that the Vietnamese are claiming that all the reports from every one of the prison camps have just vanished, disappeared. They were destroyed at the end of the war, B–52 raids, and everything like that. That is an incredulous answer to those of us asking for those records.

Colonel BOMAR. They kept very minute notes when you were being interrogated. I am sure they have records of every possible thing that happened up there.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. They would certainly keep the records of the person that they issued the car to, right? I mean, this is not like the camp commander riding on a bicycle, right?

So let us note that the people supposedly representing our government are telling us that they are letting the Vietnamese off the hook on those records. I am going to ask today—we will ask and find out whether or not they have insisted on the name of this English teacher, "Fidel," from the Vietnamese. If they are not pushing the Vietnamese on this, why are they not pushing to get these things from the Vietnamese? Why are they offering these excuses for the Vietnamese?

Would any of you like to add to that?

Captain VOHDEN. For one thing, there was this guy called "The Rabbit." He was probably the most well-known interrogation officer up in Vietnam. I have seen "Rabbit" talking to "Fidel," so there is no doubt in my mind whatsoever that they know. They would have to go to "Rabbit" and ask "Rabbit" what his name was. I am sure "Rabbit" wouldn't say.

Mr. BENGE. I might also end up suggesting that they ask "The Lump," and there are DIA reports of "The Lump's" presence that should have his name in Cuba.

There are also congressional reports.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So we should be pushing——

Mr. BENGE. That would seem be the first person to ask.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Ask about that particular person "The Lump"—they should find him in order to ask about the names of these torturers. We will try to find out whether or not those people, supposedly representing our interest and supposedly representing the U.S. Government, have actually fulfilled that responsibility in a competent manner. You can count on that.

Mr. Garcia, you mentioned something previously—I read something by you where you said that during the war, you were in Central Highlands and that someone had said something about your not using your name, because there were other Cubans around but were on the other side; is that correct?

Mr. GARCIA. No, that is the testimony of one of the members of our organization. His name is Leonardo Viota-Sesin, and he was in a fire base close to the Cambodia border. There was an American officer in charge of the base, and they had Montagnards working on that base. When he came to the base, the officer asked him where was he from; he said that he was Cuban, and he took him aside. He said, don't ever mention on this base that you are a Cuban, or they will kill you. When he asked why, the officer pointed out toward Cambodia and said, there is a brigade of North Vietnamese on the other side of the border. They have a group of Cubans who take care of all the interrogation, and many of the Montagnards have died over there.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So there was evidence that the Cubans are not only in North Vietnam interrogating prisoners, but outside of Vietnam. Perhaps in South Vietnam there are some intelligence reports that have been privy to that, that indicate that as well.

During the war I was not in the military, but I spent a little time in the Central Highlands with the Montagnards and found them to be very brave people. The word would have gotten around—these people had their whispering networks—if there was a Cuban person torturing them on the other side of the border.

I don't think I have any more time, but did you have something you wanted to add?

Mr. BENGE. Yes. There was Raul Valdes Vivo, who was assigned to COSVN headquarters in South Vietnam. There was a Cuban contingent at the COSVN headquarters, which was the North Vietnamese headquarters for South Vietnamese operations in Cambodia. Ironically, he was placed there by "Fidel's" brother, at the insistence of "Fidel's" brother, and the Cuban also was on the front tank.

When the North Vietnamese overran the palace in Saigon, the Cuban contingent had prestige enough with the North Vietnamese, that they were on the first tanks going into the palace. They had an engineering brigade that had maintained a good portion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail there.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much.

Let us just note, finally, you expected the fanatic Communists under Fidel Castro to have done what you are talking about because they considered that as being their job. You have to consider the Vietnamese did that, because they were doing their job. What we have to find out is why our government isn't doing its job in protecting the interest of our people and getting the word out to the people of the United States. It is either incompetence or worse.

I appreciate you putting these words on the record. This is information we need to talk about and call our government to task for not following up on information they knew about, but the rest of us didn't. Thank you.

Mr. COOKSEY. Mr. Chabot.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. I can't tell you how much respect I have, and I think every Member of the Committee has, for you gentlemen for putting your lives on the line and having to go through this terrible torture. It is almost incomprehensible that one human being can carry out this type of barbarity on another human being.

I think it is embarrassing that our government hasn't done more to bring to justice these criminals, these people that visited this horror on you. This is something that should not be swept under the rug. This is something that we ought to use the full powers of this government to get to the bottom of and to bring these people to justice.

I know we have another panel here, so I will not take up all my time. The only question I would have is, if we could actually determine who these people are—I hate to even use the term people for those who did this to the U.S. Air Force pilot and the rest of you—what do you think would be appropriate if we could bring these people to justice at this time for what they have done?

Captain VOHDEN. You say, what would be "appropriate?"

Mr. CHABOT. Yes. What do you think? If our government could bring these people to justice, what do you think would be the appropriate punishment at this point, these many years later? What do you think we should do?

Captain VOHDEN. What are they doing with Pinochet right now, I would say. What they are doing with Pinochet at a minimum and try him. If he is found guilty, hang him.

Mr. CHABOT. Colonel Bomar, I heard your testimony before, so I was wondering if you had any feelings with respect to that.

Colonel BOMAR. Yes, I think he should be tried and brought to task for what he did there. He is a murderer, and we have laws that govern this.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much, and we appreciate your testimony here today. Hopefully, as I say, this will not be swept under the rug.

Mr. COOKSEY. Mrs. Ros-Lehtinen, did you have another question?

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. I just had one more question, if I might. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Captain, you had testified today that you believe that the purpose of the "Cuba Program" was to prepare POW's for release. I have a question about the reasons that you all thought this heinous program was under way.

It has also been said that this was part of a propaganda campaign. Others said that it was a psychological experiment linked to

the university at Hanoi, and still others say that it was used as a method to test interrogation techniques.

Could it have been a combination of all of these? Please elaborate, if you might, on what you believe to have been the role of these torturers; why bring these three in, rather than Vietnamese interrogators; and why did the Vietnamese allow them such access to our U.S. pilots.

Captain VOHDEN. I think they wanted to release some prisoners about the time this program started. I think this "surrender" program was like, you have a child; you want the child to do something, and you spank that kid to make him do what you want him to do.

There may have been some guys in the program who surrendered without being tortured, but they wanted you to surrender. So, after we all had surrendered, we started to get a few extra cigarettes a day. He brought us tea in the morning. We got a chess set. He gave me a cigar to smoke. He gave us these extra-special things to make us feel good. Then he started moving more and more guys into the room. So that, if we were released, we could say, yeah, we were with a bunch of guys?

Another thing he did, he forced us to carve things, little wooden toys and things like this. This would be used to show our remorse, and we could give these to the Vietnamese people. Everything to make us look good if we were released.

Another thing we did, we built a fish pond; we dug a big hole, and they put fish in it to help the Vietnamese people.

Then that last day when the announcement came that the POW's were going to be released, they came down and cut our wires so we couldn't hear it. So I think all these reasons indicate to me that it was a release program.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Colonel?

Colonel BOMAR. I agree that we were there for more than Vietnamese propaganda. It was a bigger thing to me, as I stated, whether it was the Tet Offensive or whether it was this meeting in Havana. There was more to this "Fidel" program.

But I think it was also, as you said, it could have been techniques that they could use to break Americans or prisoners. You listed several reasons, and every one seemed to fit. They could all have been, but I think release may have been a possibility, although I don't think they would have released me.

Captain VOHDEN. Could I add something?

I think they were just looking for someone in the group who potentially might be released.

Another thing, when we had quizzes, "Fidel" talked about the war and about going home all the time. He showed us pictures of fashion models in Magazines. He talked about our wives and families. We saw articles in Time and Newsweek magazine. He tried every argument in the book to convince us that the U.S. war was wrong. He did a lot of these things. Again, this helped me to form my opinion.

Mr. BENGE. In my research report, there is a copy of an FBI report that gives the name of a Cuban gentleman who went to Hanoi and coincides with the exact time that the "Cuba Program" stopped. It coincides with the exact time that the outside Cuban

showed up at the camp and the program was shut down, and in that FBI report it says that this man was going to gather this information for this second symposium on war crimes trials. It is a very interesting, interesting piece, and it fits exactly right with the timing that the program was shut down.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I would ask that Chairman Gilman's letter, dated November 1st, to Louis Freeh, the Director of the FBI, be made a part of our record, indicating that he would like the FBI's cooperation, especially as it relates to the new partners that we have in Eastern Europe and the new Soviet Republics and elsewhere, former Communist regimes that are now moving further toward democracy, who have opened up many of their records. We would like for the FBI to work with our new allies to look at those files and ask the individuals there for help in discovering who these three torturers were and identifying them. I ask that it be made a part of the record.

[The information referred to appears in the appendix.]

Mr. COOKSEY. Without objection.

Again, you have been excellent witnesses, and again, this is a story that needs to be told.

Today we find time to investigate the war criminals that have committed similar crimes in the Balkans just in very recent history and very recent memory. But this world also has time to investigate the people that committed war crimes in World War II. Stalin, he probably killed more people than anyone else, also Hitler and his henchmen. Vietnam is recent memory for those of us that were in the military at the time. This is something that should be pursued, too, no matter what the politics of it is.

I think that it is interesting to observe who is here today and who is not here today at this hearing. I know that two of you were on active duty in the military at the time. You were Cold War warriors in what was probably the Third World War, and you did win ultimately that war by standing up to this Communist threat. Those records that my colleague just referred to are out there; they are out there in some recent publications.

But, going back to the time that we were all in the military—Air Force, Navy, Army, whatever—we had incompetent leadership in the executive branch of government at that time. According to David Halberstam's book, "The Best and the Brightest," the people that were in Johnson's Cabinet were incompetent as well and were responsible for some real dumb things that were done in fighting the air war in Vietnam. If you want to get a good look at that period, I would encourage you to read a book, "The Tragedy of the Soviet Period," written by Martin Malia. It was written by a UC-Berkeley professor. I know you made a comment about a UC-Berkeley professor, but this is a book I would encourage you to read.

There is another book, "The Black Book of Communism." Where you can go back and find out what really went on. These records are available.

Again, I want to thank you for coming, for being here today. I feel very strongly that this should be pursued. Again, you have been excellent witnesses. We will move on to the next panel. Thank you very much.

Mr. COOKSEY. Our second panel is made up of two individuals who are former military officers, former United States Army officers, and they are now at the Department of Defense. The first is Mr. Robert Jones, who has served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Prisoner of War-Missing Personnel Affairs since May 1998. Mr. Jones is a decorated two-tour Vietnam combat veteran; he is also a disabled veteran. Previously, Mr. Jones was a Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Robert Destatte is a Technical Adviser to the Deputy Assistant Secretary. Mr. Destatte is the Chief Analyst of the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office.

So we are delighted to have you here. I feel that you both can speak with some authority because you are both veterans, Vietnam veterans, and have a major responsibility for looking into this matter.

Mr. COOKSEY. We will open with you, Mr. Jones.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT L. JONES, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, PRISONER OF WAR-MISSING PERSONNEL AFFAIRS

Mr. JONES. Thank you. I welcome today's opportunity to address the Committee on the roles my office and the former Defense Intelligence Agency's Special Office on POW/MIA Affairs have had in the "Cuba Program," a program whose brutal purpose still remains unresolved.

I ask that my statement in its entirety be entered into the record after this hearing.

Mr. COOKSEY. Without objection.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Chairman, DOD became aware of the "Cuba Program" immediately following Operation Homecoming, and we have shared our knowledge with the appropriate agencies and the Congress beginning as early as July, 1973. We have appeared before in congressional hearings on this subject in 1987 and again in 1996.

Mr. Chairman, I truly am humbled to follow this group of former POW's who have addressed the Committee here this morning. None of us can fully understand the trying experiences and inhumane treatment that they endured while they were in captivity. These men sacrificed greatly for this Nation. They are truly American heroes whose sacrifices stretch the limits of one's imagination. Those who endured the abuses of the "Cuba Program" suffered dearly and are examples of those whose sense of duty and commitment to our Nation was tested to the limits of their human endurance. Thankfully, all of those who were involved in this brutal activity have been accounted for and returned to the United States.

The mission of my agency is to account for those American heroes who were lost while serving in foreign lands and have not returned to American soil. Currently, there are 2,047 Americans who remain unaccounted for in Southeast Asia. My office pursues the resolution of those cases by using a number of investigative tools. We have received more than 21,000 reports possibly pertaining to Americans in Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, none of those have led us to the return of a single live American.

We have a robust archival research and oral history program, as well as unilateral and trilateral investigations in each of the three Southeast Asian countries. These methods have, in fact, produced significant investigative leads that have led to a number of resolved cases. To date, we have accounted for 536 missing Americans. We continue to pursue all avenues with live Americans as our No. 1 priority.

As my staff explained in their separate briefing to Representative Ros-Lehtinen, our ability to accomplish this humanitarian mission is wholly dependent on the willingness of foreign governments around the globe to allow American POW/MIA specialists access to their territory, their citizens and their historical records. I firmly believe that any attempt on the part of the Department of Defense to merge investigations of war crimes into our accounting activities may jeopardize our ability to accomplish our humanitarian mission.

DPMO is not a criminal investigative arm of the Federal Government. Our mission is separate. We are charged with the fullest possible accounting for U.S. military and certain American civilian personnel who become missing as a result of hostile action. Our mission is humanitarian in nature, not linked to other bilateral foreign policy concerns.

DPMO's role with regard to the "Cuba Program" has been to act as a repository of historical information to ensure it is available to the appropriate Federal agencies. The sensitivities associated with our humanitarian accounting mission clearly prohibit us from any involvement in the pursuit of the perpetrators of these misdeeds.

Based upon recent congressional inquiries, I directed a complete historical file review and requested other Federal agencies to provide us with information they may have related to this issue. This is being done to ensure that my office has a comprehensive record of the "Cuba Program" as a historical file.

I was informed on October 29th that Ambassador Peterson has met with Mr. Hung, Director of the Americas Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to request the assistance of the Government of Vietnam in supplying information about the Cuban interrogators of American POW's from 1967 to 1968. Mr. Hung listened with interest and responded that he would research the questions presented in the talking points that the Ambassador left with him. I believe we all look forward to the responses to those questions.

I personally will be in Southeast Asia during the period of November 29th through the 11th of December, traveling throughout Southeast Asia, to include Vietnam. Rest assured I will discuss this program with Ambassador Peterson upon my arrival in Hanoi.

Mr. Chairman, I share the same sense of outrage that you and the Members of the Committee do regarding the torturous abuse endured by our prisoners of war at the hands of these presumed Cuban interrogators. I believe that the pursuit of these criminals by my agency has a real potential to disrupt our mission to return our men, or their remains, to their families, many of whom have waited for more than 50 years. I do not recommend my office taking such action when it has the potential to jeopardize the hopes of the families of our missing.

I do believe with all my heart that these men should be tracked down, brought to justice by the appropriate agency. I recommend that requests for further investigation of the "Cuba Program" be directed to the appropriate agencies that are chartered to pursue violations of the law of armed conflict. DPMO stands equally ready to continue to provide information to an interagency group as required. We will continue our policy of transparency, making available our historical files and knowledge on this issue.

I clearly support the goals for this hearing as stated by Representative Ros-Lehtinen. I will also say that I will be in Moscow next week. Rest assured that I will raise this "Cuba Program" with my Moscow counterpart.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I would like to introduce a Member of my staff, Mr. Bob Destatte, a senior Southeast Asia analyst, a man who I respect very highly for his knowledge of Southeast Asia. I believe Mr. Destatte can address any technical questions you or the Committee may have.

Thank you. This concludes my remarks.

Chairman GILMAN. [Presiding.] Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Jones appears in the appendix.]

Chairman GILMAN. Mr. Destatte, if you wish you may put your full statement in the record or you may summarize, whichever you may deem appropriate.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT DESTATTE, CHIEF ANALYST, PRISONER OF WAR-MISSING PERSONNEL OFFICE, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Mr. DESTATTE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Chairman Gilman, and distinguished Committee Members. I have a short statement. I would like to read it and I would like to ask that the statement be entered into the record in its entirety.

Chairman GILMAN. Without objection, the full statement will be made part of the record.

Mr. DESTATTE. First, let me join Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Jones in saluting the American heroes who shared with this Committee this morning their experiences as victims of what has become known as the "Cuba Program." One of those gentleman, Captain Ray Vohden, and I worked together for a while in the Pentagon, when I first joined this issue. Let me begin.

Chairman GILMAN. Put the mike a little closer, Mr. Destatte. Thank you.

Mr. DESTATTE. I would like to begin with a brief description of the "Cuba Program" on the basis of what is in the written record, which I believe will complement the personal accounts that we received earlier this morning.

The American POW's coined the term "Cuba Program" to describe a program in which a small team of Caucasian interrogators brutally beat and tortured 19 American aviators in a camp that our POW's nicknamed "The Zoo" in Hanoi, between July 1967 and August 1968. One of those POW's, as we heard earlier today, U.S. Air Force Major Earl Cobeil, eventually died from those beatings.

The Caucasian interrogators spoke English fluently, but with a Spanish accent. They spoke knowledgeably about Central America and the United States. In an exchange with one of our POW's, a

Vietnamese guard referred to the Caucasian interrogators as Cubans. These and other factors led many of the POW's and analysts, including myself, to believe that the interrogators were Cubans, possibly Cubans who had lived in the United States.

The POW's nicknamed the chief Caucasian interrogator "Fidel." They nicknamed his principal assistant "Chico." several days before the program ended, a third man the POW's nicknamed variously "Pancho" and "Garcia" appeared to replace "Fidel." The POW's, as we heard earlier, observed another man who might have been Cuban working as an electrical technician in the POW camp during the closing months of the program. They also heard the voice of a woman they believed was Cuban on the camp radio for about two weeks near the end of the program.

The DOD first learned about the "Cuba Program" in March, 1973 when the reports of the first post-homecoming debriefings began arriving in the Defense Intelligence Agency's Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Office. By March 1973, nearly two weeks before the last POW was released, the DIA's POW/MIA Office had brought this issue to the attention of senior Department of Defense officials; and by the 23rd of March, the U.S. Government had established a coordinated effort to learn the identity of the Cubans. That effort involved the Defense Intelligence Agency, each of the armed services, the National Security Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee's chief investigator, among others.

In April, 1974, a little over a year later, the CIA informed the DIA that CIA analysts had tentatively identified the interrogator, nicknamed "Fidel," as one Luis Perez, also known as Luis Perez Jaen, a captain in the Cuban Ministry of Interior. This captain was in Hanoi during the "Cuba Program", had a history of interrogating foreigners in Cuba, and was in the U.S. during 1956 and 1957, buying and shipping arms to Cuba; and he possessed most of the physical and personality traits of "Fidel" that our POW's had described.

The CIA provided DIA a copy of a photograph of Luis Perez Jaen that was published in the Cuban newspaper, Oriente, on 25 February 1959. The photograph, which we have shared with the Committee, depicts Perez Jaen wearing a military cap and a full beard.

Between November, 1975 and mid-1976, U.S. Air Force investigators asked seven victims of the "Cuba Program" to examine this photograph of Luis Perez Jaen. Six of these men could not state positively that he was the interrogator they nicknamed "Fidel," primarily because the photograph depicts him wearing a full beard. One of the seven, Colonel Donald Waltman, wrote in a 1976 note to a U.S. Air Force investigator, quote, "I say, yes, that is 'Fidel', or at least a guy who looks too much like him. I have to try to imagine him clean shaven, and when I do, it is him. Maybe because I would like to ID him so damn bad. It is the most look-alike 'Fidel' picture I have seen," end quote.

Also in April, 1974, the CIA informed the DIA that "Chico" might be a Cuban named Veiga, whose first name they did not know, an employee of the Cuban Department of State Security. Reportedly, Veiga had studied at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1958 and 1959. An extensive followup investigation by U.S. Air

Force investigators failed to confirm the identity of this person. Other names have been suggested over the years; however, subsequent investigations either ruled them out or proved inconclusive.

For example, the DIA POW/MIA Office provided historical information about the "Cuba Program" to the FBI when it investigated a 1987 report that a Cuban employee of the United Nations might be one of the Cuban interrogators. The FBI worked closely with returned POW's in that investigation.

Captain Vohden described the three days he spent going over photos associated with that investigation. However, the POW's could not positively identify the Cuban at the United Nations as one of the men who tortured them in Hanoi.

Recent news stories suggest that the Cuban Minister of Education, Fernando Vecino Alegret, is the interrogator our POW's nicknamed "Fidel." Fernando Vecino Alegret first came to our attention shortly before he visited the United States in November, 1978. At that time, Federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies examined the possibility that he was the interrogator named "Fidel." We have been searching our historical files for any record we might have received from those agencies concerning this man. Two days ago, we discovered a still-classified September, 1973 report that described Fernando Vecino Alegret as an engineering graduate, who studied at the University of Havana during 1962–65. The report also stated that he founded the Cuban Military Technical Institute in September 1966 and that he was its Director from September, 1966 until January, 1973.

We have not yet had time to confirm the origin and reliability of that report. However, if the information in the report is accurate, there is little chance that Fernando Vecino Alegret could be the interrogator "Fidel."

Among the names we have received, the two names the CIA suggested in 1974 remain the most likely candidates for the interrogators named "Fidel" and "Chico," but I should emphasize we do not know who he is.

The only information we have concerning the purpose of the "Cuba Program" comes from the American POW's who were victims and two Vietnamese military officers. The preponderance of information in our files, most of it coming from the returnees themselves, suggests that the "Cuba Program" was a Cuban assistance program that went awry, and that the Vietnamese terminated the program shortly after the interrogator named "Fidel" beat Major Cobeil into a near-catatonic state from which he never recovered.

The Department of Defense has kept the Congress informed about the "Cuba Program" from the very beginning. For example, the DPMO's predecessor office, the Defense Intelligence Agency's Special Office for Prisoners of War/Missing in Action Affairs, presented testimony about the "Cuba Program" to the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee during hearings on 2 July 1973, about three months after the last American POW was released. A former POW who was a victim of the program, U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander Larry Spencer, also testified before the Subcommittee.

Later, the DIA POW/MIA Office provided historical information to the Subcommittee's chief investigator, Mr. Alfonso L. Tarabochia, who conducted an independent effort to identify the in-

terrogators. I believe Captain Vohden also made reference to that investigation. By September, 1974, Mr. Tarabochia had tentatively concluded that "Fidel" was a Cuban named Pedro Fumero. Unfortunately, the returned POW's who were victims of "Fidel" could not identify Fumero as one of their interrogators.

The DPMO's DIA predecessor office also provided an appraisal to the House Armed Services Committee on 6 October, 1977. More recently, the DPMO provided updates on the "Cuba Program" to Congressman Dornan in March, 1987, August, 1996, and 11 and 17 September, 1996.

The story about the "Cuba Program" is not new. For example, I have with me eight news articles about the "Cuba Program" published in 1973, 1977, and 1981 in Washington, D.C., New York, Baltimore, Denver, and Des Moines. These articles are based on information released by DPMO's predecessor, the DIA's POW/MIA Office, and personal accounts by POW's who were victims of the program.

I would like to comment briefly for the public record about recent press reports about the "Cuba Program." News reports published in the *Miami Herald* on 22 August, 1999, and the *Seattle Times* on 28 October 1999, suggested that this issue was, "concealed for decades by official U.S. secrecy" and, "the full story of Fidel and the so-called 'Cuba Program' is finally becoming public,". The same article speculated that the reason the story has drawn little attention is, "perhaps because most POW's obeyed Pentagon orders to keep quiet to protect POW's who might remain in Vietnam and perhaps because 'Fidel's' identification as a Cuban was then only an unconfirmed allegation by the POW's."

The facts are that the Department of Defense officials asked the POW's who were returning during Operation Homecoming in 1973 not to speak out publicly about the torture until after the last POW was released. The last POW was released on 1 April 1973; the first stories by returning POW's about the "Cuba Program" appeared in American newspapers the next day, on 2 April, 1973.

Some of the sources cited in these articles portrayed DPMO's role incorrectly. As Mr. Jones stated, we are not a counterintelligence office or a law enforcement office. Our mission is humanitarian. It is to account for American servicemen who were lost while serving abroad. All American victims of the "Cuba Program" are accounted for.

Successive administrations, the Congress, the Department of State, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office, the Pacific Command's Joint Task Force, the U.S. Army Central Identifications Laboratory, the National League of Families—literally thousands of Americans have worked hard for many years to build and sustain programs that today are allowing us to account for Americans lost in the old Soviet Union, in North Korea, in Southeast Asia, and many other areas in the world.

As Secretary Jones stated earlier, our mission is humanitarian, and it is worldwide. Our ability to accomplish our mission is wholly dependent on the willingness of foreign governments to allow our POW/MIA specialists to have access to their citizens, their records, and their territory. Suggestions that DPMO should investigate war

crimes risks undoing the results of years of hard work and would jeopardize our ability to accomplish our humanitarian mission.

Now, having said that, DPMO is a central repository for historical information concerning the American POW/MIA issue. As Secretary Jones stated earlier, DPMO stands ready to share historical information and knowledge about the program with appropriate U.S. agencies. In conclusion, the history of the issue is that the POW/MIA Office informed senior Department of Defense officials immediately upon learning about the actions of the presumably Cuban interrogators. Those officials immediately directed appropriate intelligence and investigative agencies to try to identify those interrogators. In 1974, CIA analysts tentatively identified two Cuban officials as the interrogators "Fidel" and "Chico." Their victims, however, were not able to confirm their identities.

We have also kept the Congress and the public informed. We will remain a repository of historical information about all aspects of the POW/MIA issue and remain ready to share that historical information with appropriate Federal intelligence and investigative offices. However, as Secretary Jones stated earlier, we believe that DPMO should not become involved in efforts to investigate the program and jeopardize our accounting mission.

I am ready to respond to questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Destatte appears in the appendix.]

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much. There were several Vietnamese interrogators at "The Zoo," as we had heard from the POW's, "Spot," "Rabbit," "Elf," in addition to the camp commander who we discussed in the previous panel known as "The Lump."

Have any attempts been made by DOD or any other U.S. agency to question these individuals in order to try to obtain further information about these Cuban torturers?

Mr. DESTATTE. I personally asked the interrogator whom Captain Vohden and Colonel Bomar call "The Rabbit" about this program. While he acknowledged that these men were Cubans, he did not provide the names, and I don't know of any other efforts.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. So he said they were Cubans.

Mr. DESTATTE. I don't recall the exact words of the conversation, but it was during a formal interview. My memory is that I mentioned to him that several of our returned POW's described having been interrogated by Cubans at the POW camp the Americans called "The Zoo," and that the Vietnamese called Nga Tu So.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. When did this conversation take place?

Mr. DESTATTE. This conversation took place—I would have to check my notes—in the early 1990's, sometime in 1992.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. We will followup on that. Thank you.

Without actually revealing the details since the report is still classified, do you know the origin, the author, the source of the information in the CIA report on the "Cuba Program" and the two men mentioned in the CIA report, "Fidel" and "Chico," as possibly being Cuban agents, part of Castro's Ministry of Interior. Was any followup done to this CIA report?

Mr. DESTATTE. There was followup. The CIA report included, as an enclosure, a 1959 photograph of the Cuban their analysts believe was "Fidel." The Air Force, Air Force investigator showed that

photograph to seven of the victims of the program. Six of those men stated that they were unable to confirm that this was "Fidel." The seventh, as I mentioned in my statement, Colonel Waltman, believed that it was "Fidel," or at least the most look-alike photograph he had seen of "Fidel."

Other persons have looked at that photograph. As a matter of fact, at the close of the last panel, I asked Colonel Carpenter, who was sitting behind the table here, and Captain Vohden again about that, and they were quite insistent this is not "Fidel." So I suppose, parenthetically, our experience has been that making identifications of persons from photographs is a very uncertain endeavor. It is unlikely to yield conclusive results.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Jones, you had said in your testimony that you will soon be in Vietnam, in just a few days. In our dealings with the Vietnamese, particularly in recent years as trade negotiations have intensified, has the U.S. raised the issue of the "Cuba Program" specifically with those officials? Have there been any official requests for information? Why or why not?

Mr. JONES. I cannot answer in regard to the trade negotiations because my office does not participate in those negotiations, ma'am. We are fully engaged in negotiating with the Vietnamese concerning accounting for missing Americans. So I am afraid I am not the person to answer that question.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Eliminate the part about trade negotiations. I just said that to parenthetically state that we are in such a positive working relationship with Vietnam that now we are discussing trade deals.

But having nothing to do with trade, what about the many U.S. agencies that have specifically asked? Do you know if yours or any others asked the Vietnamese officials about the "Cuba Program," specific requests made for information?

Mr. JONES. As I mentioned and as Mr. Destatte mentioned earlier, he personally took part in an oral history interview of one of the guards that was mentioned by the former POW's. So there has been some followup in that regard. However, as we testified earlier, all of the participants in this particular program have been accounted for. Thus, the role of my office has been completed in terms of investigating specifically what happened to those 19 individuals. We continue to act as a repository for the historical records related to that program.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Do you believe that the acts committed against the POW's violate the Geneva Convention? If those are found to be true, do you believe that, once identified, the three torturers should be tried as war criminals and that we should gear efforts toward that goal?

Mr. JONES. As I testified in my statement, ma'am, I firmly support the goals that you stated earlier for the purposes of this hearing, and I most certainly believe that those individuals should be tracked down and brought to justice for their conduct.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Now, you had said that your specific agency has a specified mission. What agency then do you believe should lead the investigation on the "Cuba Program" and what agencies, in addition, should be included? Should CIA, DIA, FBI, State Department be? What agencies should be involved?

Mr. JONES. Looking at the nature of the circumstances, I believe that the State Department should be lead agency. I believe that they have an office that is charged to investigate violations of the Geneva Convention and the laws of armed conflict. So I believe that the State Department would be the best agency to lead a review of this program and to conduct a followup investigation. I believe that they should be supported by the appropriate Intelligence Community—DIA, CIA, as well as the FBI.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Destatte, we understand that DPMO has joint commissions with Russia and is working together with former Eastern Bloc countries in an attempt to obtain information about American POW's which may have been sent to those countries during various Cold War conflicts. Further, we understand that television and other mediums are used to reach out to the general population of those countries so that they can help us have information to contribute.

Have similar attempts been made regarding information on the "Cuba Program" and the torturers?

Mr. DESTATTE. We have taken a different approach in Vietnam. Let me preface my remarks by stating that I helped open the first U.S. office in Vietnam after the war in 1991, and worked over there for the American POW/MIA Office which we opened in mid-1991. One of the first things we did was put together a program where we visited each of the military region headquarters and each of the province headquarters and delivered to each of those headquarters information about Americans who were lost in their respective areas, requesting their support in finding witnesses, finding documents and otherwise accounting for the men who were lost in those regions.

We have also since 1988, approximately 5 times a year, sent for a month at a time approximately 100 Americans, mostly active duty military personnel, into Vietnam. They break down into small teams of varying sizes, they fan out through the country looking for information or excavating crash sites or grave sites that were discovered during earlier investigations. I believe that it would be difficult to find a single village in Vietnam that has not been visited at least once by one of our teams. I think it would be almost impossible to find an adult citizen of Vietnam who is not aware of our keen interest in accounting for our people.

So we have taken a different approach in Vietnam than the Joint Commission is taking in Russia. I believe we have covered the country very effectively, and I believe the results that we have seen in recent years of this approach demonstrates the effectiveness of that approach.

Mr. JONES. If I might add to that, I will be traveling to Moscow on Sunday. I will be in Moscow through the 10th of November. Rest assured that I will raise this at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and with the Russian with whom I will be meeting.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Jones. Have you had a chance to look at Ambassador Peterson's letter that we just received this morning? You will be following up with him and other officials in Vietnam on this issue?

Mr. JONES. I am hopeful, ma'am, that we will have a response from the Vietnamese before I get to Vietnam. But if we do not, rest

assured that I will speak to the Ambassador in regard to this program.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. One last question: Are you aware of reports which state that the suspect that the CIA believes to be "Fidel" was in the U.S. and involved in smuggling arms to Castro in the 1950's; and did you know that both Alegret and Jaen were in the United States at the same time, and this comes from Alegret by his own admission as quoted in a book that was published by the Castro regime?

We want to note, if there is any followup that you know of on this data, was it used to trying to discern which of the two was in fact "Fidel," if any; and given that Alegret and the one whom the CIA believes to be "Chico" were in Louisiana and other U.S. locations at the same time, were there any efforts to determine whether Alegret was actually "Chico," and that the name that the CIA had for "Chico" was an alias? What attempts have been made to followup on any of these bits of information?

Mr. DESTATTE. I don't know that we have. I know that we do not have a comprehensive record of all the actions that were taken because, as I mentioned earlier, we were not the investigators. The investigations were conducted by the Air Force, by the other service agencies—the FBI, CIA, et cetera.

The document that I mentioned to you earlier this morning recognizes that there are unconfirmed reports that Alegret attended high school in the United States. Given his age, I believe his date of birth is 1939, I graduated from high school in 1957, and I was born in 1939. So he was in the United States at conceivably the same time as Jaen, but under different circumstances. But that is just speculation on my part. I don't know what efforts were made by other agencies.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. I think it is clear that since this first was looked at at this point in time a lot of new information has come out, a lot of new testimony, declassified papers, new information that could help us to identify these individuals; and certainly an interagency task force would be one of the ways to get at this information. We hope that that comes about.

I would like to recognize Mr. Rohrabacher for questions.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Now, Mr. Destatte, you asked one of the guards——

Mr. DESTATTE. Not a guard, he was a——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Interrogator.

Mr. DESTATTE. He was a commissioned officer. He described himself as an interpreter. POW's described him as an interrogator.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You asked him about whether or not the other interrogators were Cuban, and the answer was?

Mr. DESTATTE. I described the program in a sentence or two—my memory is that I described it in a sentence or two and asked him to comment on it. In response, he referred to them as Cubans. Now, whether he was following my lead or whether that was confirmation, I leave that up to your judgment.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. This was a formal interview, you said. That is how you described it?

Mr. DESTATTE. Yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You recorded this interview?

Mr. DESTATTE. I don't recall whether we recorded that interview or not. I know typically when I write a report I usually record over the interview tapes in any event.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You record over the interview tapes after you have conducted a formal interview?

Mr. DESTATTE. The purpose of the recording the interview in most instances is to aid in report writing.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I am a little fascinated by that. You are saying that of your formal interviews, you actually don't keep records of them then?

Mr. DESTATTE. That is not what I said.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. It sounds like what you are telling me is that you record over the tapes when you do—I am just requesting you to send that tape and that interview to me.

Mr. DESTATTE. If I have the tape.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Seeing that you just said you record over the interviews, perhaps that will be a good excuse for not sending me the tape.

But if you have it, I am making a formal request, Madam Chairman, from this Committee; and we will confirm this with the Chairman of the Committee, that this is a formal request from the Committee.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Rohrabacher. We will pass that on to the Chairman, and I am sure that he will work with you on that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I would like the notes and the tape that you have from that interview.

During that interview you said you asked about the names, but he wouldn't tell. Is that what you said?

Mr. DESTATTE. Did not tell me.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. What year was this interview?

Mr. DESTATTE. June, 1992.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. June, 1992.

Mr. DESTATTE. I might add that the document that I just consulted for that date is part of the official record of the 17 September 1996 hearing held by Congressman Dornan. You can find that document.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right. I am not just asking for the document; I am asking for that tape, and if the tape still exists——

Mr. DESTATTE. As I told you, Congressman, that was several years ago. I do not know whether I have that specific tape or not. I told you that routinely when I use a tape recorder, which is not in all cases, I use the tape recorder only to assist me in writing my report. When I finish writing the report, typically I record over that. I will have to consult our files at the office to know whether or not I retained a copy of that tape.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. That is fine. It just doesn't seem that that is a very professional way to handle——

Mr. DESTATTE. Sir, I resent your implications that I am being less than honest with you.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You may resent anything you want. I am here to ask questions. If you resent those questions——

Mr. DESTATTE. Sir, I came here to provide accurate information.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. How long have you been in the position that you are in today with this POW/MIA issue?

Mr. DESTATTE. I joined this issue in September 1979.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Is it normal that they have someone who is an employee of the Department of Defense at the same job for as long as that?

Mr. DESTATTE. I don't know what is "normal" in that respect.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You don't know what is normal policy for the Department of Defense where you have worked for all those years? You haven't noticed that other jobs seem to be rotating, but you seem to be staying in the same spot?

Mr. DESTATTE. I don't know your point.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Rohrabacher, rest assured, as soon as we return to the office, we will ascertain if the documents and the tape that you are requesting are in fact part of our files. I will do everything to personally ensure that you receive those documents.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you.

Was this the first time that you testified that we knew the day after the prisoners got back that there was a Cuban interrogation program? Was this the first time, in your interview in 1992, that a Vietnamese was officially asked about the "Cuba Program"?

Mr. DESTATTE. Let me repeat, our mission is to account for missing personnel.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes.

Mr. DESTATTE. The purpose of my interview that day was to gather information that would lead to an accounting for our personnel. Out of personal curiosity on this particular issue, the "Cuba Program," I took advantage of the opportunity to ask that question.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You don't believe that perhaps—we have a picture of a gentleman who is murdered under interrogation by these Cubans; you don't think that there might perhaps be another American that was unaccounted for that might have been murdered by the same program that we don't know about and that maybe that is your job?

Mr. DESTATTE. That assertion rests on the preposterous notion that the 19 survivors of that program either, failed to know about this alleged other prisoner, or knowing about it, failed to tell about it when they came home.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Is it preposterous to say then that there is information about this program that those 19 prisoners may not know about?

Mr. DESTATTE. No, I didn't say that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. That is what it sounds like you are saying.

Is it preposterous, for example, that the Vietnamese kept Ambassador Peterson, when he was a POW, totally isolated from the other POW's for the first three years of his captivity? Is that a preposterous suggestion?

Mr. DESTATTE. Are you familiar with the record?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. No other POW knew that Congressman Peterson was being held captive during those first three years; is that preposterous?

Mr. DESTATTE. How does that relate to our discussion here?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. It relates to it because you have a situation with interrogators from Cuba who may have information about

prisoners that is not being followed up on by you, and it is your job to followup on it. It is your job to determine if there are any MIA's out there.

Mr. DESTATTE. Are you suggesting then that there was a secret POW camp system or something of that nature?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well——

Mr. DESTATTE. I truly don't understand your question.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I will tell you. I will tell what you my question is. My question is, is there any evidence that perhaps some MIA's or people who were MIA were being held during that time period and were actually POW's, and the information was not available to the rest of the prisoners or to the United States Government?

Mr. DESTATTE. I believe that we know the identity of every American who was in that prisoner of war camp during that period of time, and that all of those prisoners are accounted for.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. That was a really good answer to a question that I didn't ask. It was really great of you to word it that way.

Mr. DESTATTE. I believe that our focus on the "Cuba Program" and what the——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. The point, Mr. Destatte, is that the "Cuba Program" may be a key to answer some information about other missing prisoners rather than just these 19.

Now, they have committed crimes——

Mr. DESTATTE. To the best of our knowledge and the to best of the knowledge of the witnesses that have appeared here today, those Cubans were active in one prisoner of war camp, the prisoner of war camp that our American prisoners called "The Zoo," that the Vietnamese called Nga Tu So. We know the identity of every American who was in that camp, and all of those Americans are accounted for.

Now, if you have information that the Cubans were active in another camp, fine. I don't have that information.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Did you ask in your formal interview in 1992 whether there were Cubans involved in any other camps?

Mr. DESTATTE. As I told you before, the purpose of that interview was to learn information that might help us account for Americans who were still unaccounted for, not to learn about the "Cuba Program." The Americans who were involved in the "Cuba Program" are all accounted for.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Fine. Luckily, I have some time to followup on these questions on the record rather than being stuck at five minutes, so your attempt to use up the time will not get you off the hook.

Is the fact that there might be another Cuban prison camp which might indicate that there are some American POW's that you didn't know about, but you are not bothering to ask whether there were Cubans at another prison in this particular formal interview that you went through?

Mr. DESTATTE. I believe that the information that the intelligence services, that the DPMO and its predecessor office, have collected over the years allows us to state with confidence that we know of every POW camp which held American prisoners in North Vietnam and all of the prisoners that were in those camps; and all

of those prisoners were accounted for. There is no separate prison camp or there are no American prisoners who were held in a separate prison.

The question about the possibility of Cubans in another prison camp is a moot question. There wasn't another prison camp for them.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Not even worth asking about it. Not even worth asking, right? Here you are, the one we are depending on to get this information.

Mr. DESTATTE. No, sir, you are depending on my office to account for Americans who are still unaccounted for. If you want to know about the Cubans, if you want to know what the Cubans did or did not do in Vietnam, then, as we have said before, we suggest that you address that question to agencies that are appropriately chartered to pursue those questions.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Is your office tasked with coordinating all government activity in terms of POW/MIA's in Vietnam?

Mr. DESTATTE. We are tasked with accounting for Americans who failed to return home at the end of the war.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Are you tasked with coordinating the activity of other government agencies?

Mr. JONES. Sir, my office as the Director of—DPMO is to be responsible to make sure what we do everything we possibly can to account for missing Americans, and that includes interagency coordination.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So if these questions were going to be examined, you would have to actually make the request or coordinate the activity?

Mr. DESTATTE. No.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. OK.

Mr. JONES. Sir, in regard to that comment, I would like to say, if you recall, in my written testimony, I did in fact send recently a request to the other Federal agencies to determine if they had any other additional information related to this program.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right.

Now, in 1992, when you conducted this formal interview for which the tapes may be missing, you asked whether or not there were Cubans involved, and you didn't ask whether the Cubans were involved in any other camps. But after that, you said that they didn't want to give you the names.

You asked for the names; they wouldn't give you any names involved. Yet haven't you categorized the North Vietnamese, or I should say, the Vietnamese activities involved with MIA/POW's as being in full cooperation with your efforts?

Mr. JONES. Sir, that is a certification that is required by the Congress of the United States. It is made by the Department of State and the President of the United States. We provide statistical information to support that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. If we have a question being asked, and you know what the names of these torturers of Americans are, and we aren't getting an answer, isn't that somewhat less than full cooperation?

Mr. JONES. Sir, that question was asked of the Vietnamese on October 9th by Ambassador Peterson.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. It was asked in June 1992.

Mr. DESTATTE. Let me comment on that.

The answer to that question does not contribute one iota to our efforts to account for Americans who are missing, and that is not——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You don't think that the torture of Americans in prisons in Vietnam and finding them and trying to ask them what went on and who it was that they were dealing with would lead to any information that we might not know about who was being held?

Have you ever met with the person that the prisoners have called "The Lump"?

Mr. DESTATTE. I have no idea who he is.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. That is not the question, have you ever met with the person. You are saying that you have not; is that correct?

Mr. DESTATTE. That is correct.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Now "The Lump," of course, is a Vietnamese. Is this part of our request to the Vietnamese Government to provide "The Lump" and interviews with "The Lump"; is that part of our request that was made by Ambassador Peterson?

Mr. JONES. Sir, I cannot say what Ambassador Peterson requested of the Vietnamese. I was not present.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So if we know this fellow known as "The Lump" has been identified, they could say who they think he was. I think that was part of the testimony today—maybe not—that was part of the testimony that they could identify him. We have not made an official request to talk to him; is that right?

Mr. JONES. Sir, I am not aware of the identity of anyone called "The Lump" that was made available to my office.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right. So we have a request for the names of the Cubans turned down in 1992 by a low-level person, and that wasn't followed up again until seven years later, I guess just recently, when Ms. Ros-Lehtinen decided to call some attention here. Again, it seems to me that what we are talking about is less than full cooperation with our efforts.

By the way, this idea, Mr. Destatte, about demanding that people who tortured Americans be sought and be prosecuted for war crimes, risks undoing all the work that we have done.

Mr. DESTATTE. Sir, that is a distortion of my statement.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Go right ahead and clarify it.

Mr. DESTATTE. I said that pursuit of that objective by my office would risk jeopardizing our ability to accomplish our mission.

If you wish to pursue that, my recommendation would be that you pursue that through an agency of the U.S. Government that is duly chartered to pursue those kinds of investigations.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. But is not your office duly chartered to task other government agencies with this type of activity?

Mr. DESTATTE. Is it not your suggestion that we do what we have just told you, which is not appropriate for our office, and that is to investigate war crimes?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. If you are an American citizen and American citizens have been tortured and a crime has been committed against American military personnel——

Mr. DESTATTE. There are 2,047 families that are waiting for answers on their missing family member. Our obligation is to account for their missing family member.

The mission of investigating war crimes lies elsewhere in the Federal Government, and I would suggest that you would get better answers by pursuing it there.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. War crimes committed against those people, the torture, the brutal torture of American prisoners of war? Is this of concern to you?

Mr. DESTATTE. As I told you before, we believe that we know the identity of every American who was a prisoner of war, and they are accounted for, those who were in the camps in North Vietnam.

Mr. JONES. Sir, if I might interject here——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Because of the full cooperation the North Vietnamese have been giving to you, what about again making just one last attempt at this. Ambassador Peterson and several other POW's and MIA's who eventually became POW's, were kept in isolated camps and did not intermingle and were declared missing in action, and no one knew whether they were alive or dead for several years—isn't that the case?

Mr. DESTATTE. I would have to go back and look at the record.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Let me clarify the record for you. Ambassador Peterson told me that personally.

Mr. DESTATTE. I also accompanied Ambassador Peterson back to that very prison camp, and he described for me and the others with him how he communicated—even though isolated, how he communicated with prisoners in other parts of that prison.

So I must tell you, I am not sure that you are accurately portraying what he said. I would have to go back to the record and refresh my memory.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I would hope that having been active for so long on this issue that your memory would be pretty good, considering that you knew we were going to have a hearing today.

Mr. DESTATTE. I came here to discuss the "Cuba Program," not to discuss the——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. The possibility that there were other Cubans involved in torturing Americans someplace else. That is what the question is. These people are what I am trying to lead to, of course——

Mr. DESTATTE. Persons were held in approximately—I don't recall the exact figure offhand, but I believe—eleven different locations in North Vietnam in the Hanoi area.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. That we know of.

Mr. DESTATTE. We believe that that there were no others. That has been looked at not just by myself. Thousands of Americans have looked at that issue very carefully, and there is not a shred of evidence that there was any other prison that held Americans.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I will just have to say that I am not convinced, and we have other people who are honest American citizens who have looked into this and are not convinced.

Some questions don't seem to be asked; they don't seem to be asked and we seem to be cataloguing or categorizing the Vietnamese as being fully cooperating with us when we are afraid to ask certain questions of them.

Mr. DESTATTE. I don't believe that that is a fair statement. The "we" in this case, I presume, means the U.S. Government; and the U.S. Government has asked the question. This particular office of the U.S. Government should not be asking those kinds of questions.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I am glad that you are so committed to your humanitarian mission. I think it is extraordinary that one individual has been at the Department of Defense at the same humanitarian mission all of these years, and I think that the reason why there are rotations in jobs like your own in the Department of Defense is to ensure that one person or several people cannot monopolize information and use their own judgment that may be good or bad judgment.

Mr. DESTATTE. There are approximately 120 or 130 men and women in our office. There is quite a turnover. There is always fresh blood, there are always fresh views. There is always a fresh questioning of assumptions and conclusions.

But there are also a few old-timers who help ensure that we don't reinvent the wheel every one or two years. One of our greatest mistakes during the Vietnam War was the institutionalization of inexperience, the one-year tour, very oftentimes broken up into six months in a given assignment.

I would suggest that the alternative to having experience is chaos.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Chairman, if I might interject at this point, the success of my office, as I testified earlier, has been based solely upon our capability to access foreign countries, their citizens, their historical archives without retribution, to assist us in accounting for the missing Americans around the globe. We have, in fact, been very successful in that because we have not pursued war crimes, we have left that up to the appropriate agencies.

As I testified earlier, I believe that such an investigation into the "Cuba Program" should be led by the appropriate office within the Department of State, supported by those other agencies who have the capabilities to assist them in that investigation. I would say for the record that based upon the current evidence on record, we have no evidence to substantiate that there was another "Cuba Program" outside the one that we are discussing here today.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. OK.

Several years ago, when I went to Vietnam with Mr. Peterson while he was a Member of Congress, we participated in negotiations with the Vietnamese. At that time, I asked for the records of the prisons that the Vietnamese had of all the Americans, and we were told that those records were not available. Many of them are like they were erased after doing other interviews, I guess, or their records were blown up by B–52 raids near the end of the war.

Now, I didn't really accept that answer, and I made an official request of them and asked our government, the people involved in this, to follow through on insisting on receiving the records of those camps, so that we could prove or disprove whether or not there was a possibility that there were people kept without other people knowing about it. Because that information would only be available in those records.

Has there been a turnover of these records to us? I guess I made that request five years ago.

Mr. DESTATTE. The Vietnamese have turned over quite a large number of records. I don't recall the exact number, but it is in the thousands. Among those records, the only record that comes to mind that fits the description that you have put forth is a record that the Vietmanese say is a record of all Americans who entered the prison system in the North. That has been turned over to us.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I am not talking about a record of all Americans; I am talking about a record of their prison system, and I was very clear about that. These people, like every other military or government operation, they kept records of how much food they bought, how much it cost, who was in charge of procuring food, how many people they were protecting and guarding, how many people they were taking care of.

Mr. DESTATTE. I recall you and I had a conversation about that on a bus in Hanoi. I made a memorandum of that conversation, and I would like to ask permission to provide a copy of that memorandum of record of our conversation to the Committee and make it a part of the official record of this hearing. I believe that will answer the question for the Committee.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Maybe instead of holding off to the point that we can't ask a followup question, maybe you could answer the question now, rather than us waiting for the memorandum?

Have the Vietnamese provided the information that I requested about their camps?

Mr. DESTATTE. To the best of my knowledge, they have not provided the document that you requested. But again I ask if I might be permitted to enter into the record, in its entirety, my memorandum of record of that conversation.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Chairman, they have not complied with the request. Yet we are talking about the Vietnamese as fully cooperating with us. I think I should leave it at that. I thank the Chairman for his indulgence.

Chairman GILMAN. [Presiding.] Thank you, Mr. Rohrabacher.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I appreciate Ms. Ros-Lehtinen permitting me to have the time. Usually I get five minutes to ask questions. I think this has been very valuable for all concerned.

Chairman GILMAN. Ms. Ros-Lehtinen.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Just a followup question on the line of questions that Mr. Rohrabacher said. We had a previous panelist, as you know, Andres Garcia; and he referred to the experiences of another Cuban American veteran, several of them, who were told that there were Cubans who served as interrogators across the Cambodian borders, a presence of Cubans possibly, and in other places beyond "The Zoo." We have been talking about that with Mr. Rohrabacher, that line of questioning; and just to reiterate, we believe that is an important area for us to do further investigation and finding out, even though you believe that other POW's may not have been tortured by these other Cubans.

Mr. DESTATTE. I can give you an answer to that offhand.

There were two camps for Americans in Cambodia. The one camp was a camp administered by what the Communists called Headquarters B–3 Front. This was the military headquarters that controlled their main force units in the Western Highlands. The other camp was subordinate to what they called B–2 Front.

In both instances, these camps were mobile, and the B–2 Front camp moved around the area along the border between Vietnam and Cambodia. Many Americans have returned from that camp and there is no evidence at all that there was any Cuban involvement in either of those camps.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. We look forward to working with you and especially with the other agencies to followup on some of these leads and reopen this case so that justice can be done in the memory of Earl Cobeil, the U.S. Air Force pilot who was murdered while in captivity, and to honor the brave service of these men who were testifying today and others who could not be here with us.

Mr. DESTATTE. If I could ask your indulgence for just a moment, we got off the track here for awhile. I share the interests of all Americans in ensuring that these people who so brutally treated our POW's and, in particular, beat Major Cobeil to death, are brought to justice properly. But at the same time, I think that it should be done in such a way that does not jeopardize our mission to account for those Americans who are still missing.

Chairman GILMAN. Thank you, Mr. Destatte.

Thank you Ms. Ros-Lehtinen.

I have just two brief questions. Secretary Jones, the fall of the Berlin Wall created an opportunity to seek information from our former Soviet bloc adversaries on the "Cuba Program" and other POW-related matters. Can you please tell us what efforts have been made to date to glean information from Eastern European and other sources?

Mr. JONES. Sir, my office has the responsibility for the oversight of the Joint Commission in support of the U.S.-Russia Commission. I have staff routinely conducting oral history interviews in former Eastern Bloc countries, former Soviet Union countries.

Chairman GILMAN. That is still ongoing?

Mr. JONES. Yes, sir. As I mentioned while you were voting, sir, I will personally be in Moscow this weekend and will be meeting with the U.S.-Russia Commission in Moscow.

Chairman GILMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Destatte, documents provided to our Committee provide uncorroborated reports that American POW's may have been taken from Vietnam to Cuba. Can you comment on those reports and tell the Committee what efforts have been made to look into and verify if such transfers did indeed take place?

Mr. DESTATTE. I am not familiar with those particular reports. But as I said earlier, I believe that we know the identity of all Americans who were held as prisoners in the Vietnamese prison system, and I believe they are all accounted for, either through their return, alive, the return of the remains; or in some cases, their deaths have been confirmed, but we have not yet been able to recover their——

Chairman GILMAN. Have you asked any specific questions with regard to that issue, the Cubans?

Mr. DESTATTE. Transfer of Americans—I think in a general sense that we pursued this question in our pursuit of information about Americans in the camps, we can answer that; but no, we have not investigated specifically or focused specifically on that that I am aware of.

Chairman GILMAN. Let me ask that you do pursue that and get back to our Committee with any response you get.

Chairman GILMAN. Mr. Jones, when you travel to Vietnam in the near future, we would like to ask you to make an effort, either directly or through our embassy, to secure meetings with the former guards at "The Zoo" or others who might be able to identify "Fidel" and the other torturers.

Would you make a request of that when you——

Mr. JONES. Sir, I will be more proactive than that.

I will request that my the collection unit, Stony Beach pursue this task and immediately begin to try to interview those individuals.

Chairman GILMAN. Thank you very much.

Secretary Jones, how many F–111's were shot down? How many F–111 pilots survived and how many were returned?

Mr. JONES. Sir, I am not qualified to answer that type of technical question. May I defer to Mr. Destatte and see if he has the information at hand.

Chairman GILMAN. F–111's?

Mr. DESTATTE. Can I give you a written answer on that? I don't recall that offhand.

Chairman GILMAN. If you could provide that for a Committee, we would appreciate that.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. I want to thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership and your commitment to discovering the truth about this terrible "Cuba Program." We thank you so much.

Chairman GILMAN. We thank our witnesses for your patience and for being here with us throughout the questioning, and we appreciate your response.

Committee will stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:05 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

November 4, 1999

Committee on International Relations
STATEMENT of CHAIRMAN BENJAMIN A. GILMAN
Hearing on THE CUBAN PROGRAM: TORTURE OF AMERICAN PRISONERS BY CUBAN AGENTS

Between July 1967 and August 1968, a team of interrogators believed to be Cubans brutally beat and tortured 19 American aviators, killing one, at a Hanoi Prisoner of War camp known as "the Zoo."

I want to thank Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, for her leadership in pursuing this issue. I served on the select committee that initially investigated the fate of American prisoners of war and those missing in action. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

This morning we will hear testimony from two distinguished panels. On our first panel, we are honored to have three former prisoners of war, including two who were subjected to the so-called Cuban program:

Navy Captain Raymond Vohden (who later served with the Defense Department's POW/Missing Personnel Office), and Air Force Colonel Jack W. Bomar, of Arizona. Our other witnesses include Michael D. Benge, a Foreign Service Officer who was a prisoner of war in Vietnam for five years, and Andres (AN-DRAYS) Garcia, the Vice President of the Cuban American Veterans Association.

On our second panel, we will be joined by Robert L. Jones, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Prisoner of War and Missing Personnel Affairs, and Mr. Robert Destatte (DES-STAT) of the Defense Department's Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office.

Recent press reports have revived interest in this terrible chapter of the Vietnam War and raised hopes that those responsible for these crimes can be identified.

In this regard, I have written to FBI Director Louis Freeh to ask the Bureau for its assistance in pursuing information in the files of former Soviet-bloc countries regarding the Cuban Program.

Those who murdered and tortured our American servicemen are still at large somewhere, possibly in Cuba. There is no statute of limitations on the crimes committed against these American servicemen. Neither shall there be a statute of limitations on our commitment to discovering the true identity of those responsible for these crimes so they may be brought to justice. Our nation owes this to the courageous men and women who served us so loyally in Vietnam.

Before we begin with our first panel, let me ask the Ranking Member, Congressman Gejdenson, if he would like to make any opening remarks.
Mr. Gejdenson.

Would any other Members like to make any opening remarks?

We will now begin taking testimony from our official witnesses. Please proceed.

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Statement by the Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

Committee On International Relations Hearing on

"The Cuba Program -Torturing of American POWs by Cuban Agents"

Thursday, November 4, 1999

I would like to thank Chairman Gilman for convening this hearing; for his ongoing leadership and commitment.

This issue is particularly important to me for various reasons but, most importantly, as I read through the accounts of what our men and women in uniform have endured throughout this century of war, I think of my husband, Dexter, who served in special forces in Vietnam and was injured in combat. He was relatively fortunate, but so many were not. I look at our POWs who are here today, and I am humbled by their sacrifices and honored to know them.

I thank them for sharing their stories with us. I know it is difficult but their presence is indicative of their caliber as human beings and as citizens in the service of this country.

The Geneva Convention prohibits "violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture" and "outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment."

This is exactly what took place at a prison camp in North Vietnam known as "The Zoo" seen here in a declassified aerial photograph. During the period August 1967 to August 1968, 19 of our courageous servicemen were psychologically tortured – some brutally beaten – by interrogators assessed to be Cuban agents working under orders from Hanoi.

Described by some to be a psychological experiment, the goals of the "Cuba Program", as the torture project has been labeled by our Defense Department and intelligence agencies, has been described in different ways -- as an attempt to test interrogation methods; to obtain absolute compliance and submission to captor demands; or, ultimately, to be used as propaganda by the international communist effort, as Mike Benge will elaborate upon during today's session.

Some POWs were tortured and then instructed to copy a series of questions and answers given to them by their interrogators. These scripts, on most occasions, included statements declaring

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that the United States was waging an "illegal, immoral and unjust war."

Prisoners were tortured – again, some psychologically and others physically – to ensure cooperation in appearances they were forced to make before visiting delegations. Refusal to comply with the captors' commands usually meant that "Fidel", "Chico", and "Pancho" – as the torturers were called by our POWs – would be called in for intense beatings of the prisoners.

In a chapter of "P.O.W.", a book published by Reader's Digest Press in 1976, Col. Bomar describes different incidents where attempts were made to "break" the prisoners so that they would recite the Communist Vietnamese script before visiting groups.

One of these occurred on July 3, 1968 when the camp medic entered the cell of Air Force Major James Kasler to bandage his draining leg. Having defied the camp commander the day before, telling him that he would not tow the line before a delegation which was to visit "The Zoo," Kasler knew what this visit by the medic meant. "It was always done prior to torture, to keep the blood and pus from staining the interrogation room."

"Within an hour, he was in torture." Enter Fidel. "Fidel reached down, grabbed Jim by the neck of his shirt, and shook him like a rag doll... Fidel seemed beside himself with rage... Then he slammed the heel of his boot down into the center of Kasler's chest... Jim gasped, fought for air..."

Kasler would not cooperate. After a while, Fidel shifted psychological gears offering a drink of water, a cigarette, turning a small table fan on Kasler. Unable to get Kasler to surrender, Fidel administered another beating. And another. And another.

"Jim's thumbs were wired together," describes Bomar. "Ropes were tied around his elbows... The flogging went on and on..." After 36 lashes, Kasler's lower back, and legs hung in shreds. The skin had been entirely whipped away and the area was a bluish, purplish, greenish mass of bloody raw meat."

Unable to get Kasler to surrender, Fidel promised to return the next day for more.

The ruthless nature of the interrogators and the severity of their actions led prisoners such as Capt. Raymond Vohden and Col. Jack Bomar, and Lt. Carpenter, who is in the audience today, to question how human beings could so batter another human being. They stood firm in the face of unrestrained brutality, intimidation, and humiliation 30 years ago.

They are demonstrating their courage once again, by working with us to ensure that the sacrifices made in defense of freedom and democracy are not forgotten; to ensure that the life and death of one of their fellow POWs and victim of the "Cuba Program", Air Force pilot Earl Cobeil, is not ignored; to ensure that justice is served.

Capt. Vohden and Col. Bomar will offer compelling and detailed testimony describing the heinous acts committed against them by Cuban agents at "The Zoo" – acts which are in direct

violation of the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War.

To violate the provisions enshrined in this document run against the grain of civilized society and undermine the integrity of the international community as a whole. Humanity is one. When one suffers, we all suffer. Violations of this protocol are not just crimes against one individual but against all of humanity.

This is the message that one of our witnesses, Andres Garcia, a Vietnam veteran and Vice President of the Cuban American Veterans Association, will underscore today.

Survivors of the "Cuba Program" have been eager to identify and trace the Cuban agents who systematically interrogated them and tortured their fellow Americans. Yet, despite their efforts, a successful resolution of this matter has not been achieved. This hearing is the first of many steps aimed at changing that outcome.

We hope to accomplish three goals today. The first is to get leads that could take us closer to an identification of the Cuban torturers. Could "Fidel" be Fernando Vecino Alegret, picture here? Is it Luis Perez Jaen as a 1974 CIA report alleged?
Is "Chico" a man by the name of Veiga as our intelligence agencies suggested in this same document? Is Gustavo Robreño Dolz the man our POWs called "Pancho"? The answer to these is our first priority.

Our second goal is to provide the basis for an ensuing interagency investigation of new evidence, including a search of pertinent data and sources previously unavailable under Cold War parameters. We are fully cognizant of the mission of DODs, Office of POW/ Missing Personnel who will be testifying today. While they are most familiar with the "Cuba Program", they have completed their mission successfully by accounting for and bringing back all 20 of our servicemen who were part of the "Cuba Program." We want the State Department, the CIA, FBI, INS, and Defense Intelligence Agency to coordinate a comprehensive approach to this case.

Lastly, this hearing will begin to establish the foundation for future action against the torturers.

On a broader scale, this investigation will serve to highlight the brutal nature of the Castro regime and the historic and ongoing threat it poses to the American people.

Ultimately, our hope is that this hearing will serve to honor these POWs who were willing to give life and limb so that we may all be free.

Mr. Chairman, as part of our preliminary investigation on this issue, I requested information from INS, the FBI, and from the Vietnamese government through our embassy in Hanoi. I ask that these letters be included in the record of today's proceedings.

JACK W. BOMAR COL USAF (RET)

I was born in Flint, Michigan on 6 June 1926. My interest in aviation began with building models of wood and paper, all of which I managed to crash after a flight or two. My parents took me to see an airshow at Bishop Airport in the 1930s.I saw formation flying by the 1st Pursuit Squadron in P-26s, and a Ford Trimotor crashed hauling passengers. A few weeks late I rode my bike out the airport, and a guy took me up in a Stinson SR. My first airplane ride!

We moved to Fort Madison, Iowa in 1940, when the DuPont Co, starting up a new paint plant, transferred my Dad. I completed High School in 1944, after taking all of the tests for Navy V-5 training, and was inducted into the Navy for active duty in July 1944. I was sent to Bowling Green State University in Ohio where I lettered in track and football. I was also the Navy bugler. I completed the required two years in 16 months, and was transferred to The University of Notre Dame.I refused to sign for an additional 6 years of Naval service after graduation because the flight training was canceled. I was transferred to Great Lakes Naval Training Center for basic training, and upon graduation was sent to serve on the U.S. Eurayle, a submarine tender, anchored at Mare Island, California. The "duration plus six" enlistment was up in August 1946, and I became a civilian once again.after singing up for 4 years in the Navy Reserve.

I finally managed to amass 40 hours of civilian flight training and received my Private Pilot license in 1946 .I purchased a Stearman from Army Surplus in Oklahoma, and headed back home with NO training in the aircraft. After losing the maps, we became lost somewhere in the middle of nowhere. The aircraft was not equiped with an electrical system, hence I had no instrument lights, and my first landing in a Stearman was into a grassy field in almost total darkness!!! I managed to keep the aircraft in one piece, and the next day flew back to Fort Madison.

I graduated from college with a degree in mathematics in 1949. I left the next week for Kansas City, where I enrolled at Central Radio-TV for a 1 year course. I graduated in 1950 and found my first job at KBOK in Waterloo, Iowa as a transmitter engineer. I soon transferred to WGIL Galesburg Ill as a transmitter and studio engineer. I left Galesburg for WOC-TV in Davenport, Iowa, where I worked as a studio/ audio engineer.

The Navy was interested in me, because of the war in Korea. I did not feel anything could be gained by me returning to a submarine tender, so I went home and enlisted in the USAF. They sent me to Offutt AFB in Omaha, Neb. with no uniforms, no records, no training. They claimed that the

training I had received in the Navy was sufficient to bypass USAF basic training. I was lucky, that with my background in electronics, a college degree, and a pilots' license, I was there when General Curtis LeMay, Sac commander, decided to build an electronics countermeasures lab at Offutt. I not only had the lab work on the base, but also started working at WOW-TV after a strike of the engineers almost shut the station down. I worked every day on the base and at WOW-TV at night from 6:00 til 1:00. General LeMay kept telling me to get some stripes on my uniform, and then surprised me by offering me a direct commission to 2nd.Lt!!! I accepted the commission, and headed down to Lackland AFB in San Antionio, Texas for officer basic military training. I was rejected for Pilot training because of a vision problem, and headed for Navigator training at Ellington AFB, Houston, Texas.The high light of this tour was obtaining a Nascar Racing License, and buying a modified stock car built by A.J. Foyt's father. I spent a lot of spare time racing on the short tracks in the area. I had a good teacher at Ellington, who allowed me to bypass all of the electronics and math courses by taking all of the final exams at the start of training, freeing up a lot of racing time. I received my Navigator Wings and soon I was off to Mather AFB in Sacramento, Calif. for advanced navigator training, and then to Shaw AFB in Sumpter S.C. My assignment was 1st Tac Recon Sq in Spangdahlem, Germany. It was a great assignment that included 1 year in theRB-26 aircraft, 1year in the RB-57 Canbera, and 1 year in the RB-66. I walked away from a crash when we over shot the runway, skidded into the trees, and almost got run over by the Crash trucks. After we had 2 boys, we headed back to the States and Mather AFB. I taught the B-47 bomb nav systen, the B-52 bomb nav system, and developed a radar course for the F-105 fighter aircraft. I was assigned to Officer Training School at Lackland AFB in 1962, where I taught Leadership to my students. All of our students were college graduates and were very sharp. They were commissioned in the USAF after 90 days, I pinned on the Lt bars of a student, who went on to pilot training, on to Southeast Asia, and we met again at the Hanoi Hilton as POWs. I flew on the USAF Model Aircraft team in National competition, which we won all five years. Only the top 5 modelers in the entire USAF made those teams. I flew a pulse jet model that I had designed and built, at 159 m.p.h. I flew the embassy runs into Central and South America once a month during this period, giving navigational flight checks to the rated personnel on the base.

I was grounded after an annual flight physical revealed a kidney disorter in 1965. I was scheduled to receive a kidney transplant, which I refused. And I was grounded permanently. After 1 year I was allowed to request a waiver,

and guess what??? I was returned to flying status and received my orders to Takhli, Thialand. After Survival Schools in Washington, and the Philippines, I was assigned to the 41st Tac Recon Sq at Takhli. I arrived there Dec 1966. I was shot down over North Vietnam on 4 Feb 1967. I suffered a broken ankle, compressed disk in my back, a chunk of shrapnel in my left leg, hand injuries, and burns, during the bailout. I was returned to U.S. control 4 Mar 1973. I retired in 1974 with the rank of Colonel at Williams AFB, Arizona. I had purchased a Cessna aircraft, and was getting into the general aviation business when I suffered an aneurysm in my face that required 5 hrs surgery to repair. This included a broken nose, a broken cheekbone, and a broken jaw. This was a direct result of torture by a CUBAN in North Vietman.

FROM: JACK WILLIAMSON BOMAR

Excerpts from John Hubbell's P.O.W. There is about 35 pages included in this fax.
Pages pertain to the "Cuban Program" carried out in North Viet Nam.
The story told here was told by men that were actual POW's under "fidel" - not as told by others not there. John Hubbell personally interviewed, checked and double checked all information given him. The POW's I have met all agree this is the best written and most factual account of the experiences by the POW's in Viet Nam.
There is no second hand or third hand information as other books contain.

A Definitive History of
the American Prisoner-of-War Experience
in Vietnam, 1964–1973

P.O.W.

John G. Hubbell
in association with Andrew Jones and Kenneth Y. Tomlinson

READER'S DIGEST PRESS
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Foreword

Like millions of other Americans who in February, 1973, watched on television the dramatic homecoming of the POWs, I found myself absorbed in the event, and full of wonderment at the men. Suspicions of a harsh confinement notwithstanding, most who were returning after years of imprisonment seemed to be healthy, both physically and spiritually. Certainly, most still knew how to smile, and to speak with what seemed an almost old-fashioned enthusiasm for their America, a country long and tragically riven with dissension over the war.

Suddenly, one was intensely aware that these men really existed. True, for a long time they had been an emotional rallying point for the country; most of the most ardent protagonists on both sides of the war issue had at least been united in a common concern for the welfare of the POWs. Still, for many Americans the POWs had until now remained pretty much a nameless, faceless group, a vague entity. No longer. Now, suddenly, they were living, breathing, walking, talking, smiling young men, husbands, sons, brothers, fathers, friends

from whom we all had been separated for a very long time and who at last were coming home. It had been such a long war and, for so many of them, such a long captivity that they seemed almost to be returning from the dead.

Most Americans, even if they did not understand the war, knew all too well what had happened during the war years, in South Vietnam and in the United States. What no one knew was how America had done in the Communist prisons of Vietnam. Exactly what had happened to these men, who had been gone so long and who now were returning in apparent fine fettle? American military men are taught that the prisoner of war camp is but an extension of the battlefield, and that if captured they are to continue the fight, to keep as many as possible of the enemy tied down. Thus, in this longest of American wars, some of these returnees had remained in combat longer than any other Americans in our history. What had it been like? What had been the nature of their battle? What of their captors' strategy and tactics, and how had the POWs countered them? How had they been treated? How had they acquitted themselves? How had they endured?

Such thoughts were also in the minds of editors of *Reader's Digest*. For years, I had been writing on national defense and related matters for the *Digest*. Now, I was queried as to whether I might be interested in exploring the possibility of writing a narrative history of the POW experience in Vietnam. Explorations were conducted. So rich were the earliest assays that the *Digest* quickly committed itself to the work.

The dimensions of the evolving narrative were frightening, as I had known they would be. To weave together the strands of hundreds of lives over a nine-year period was to find a collective experience that seemed so much larger than life that the writer of fiction surely would hesitate to submit it for publication—it might have been too much to believe, except that there it was, a history that contemporary Americans actually had lived, and many had lived to recount: tales of unrestrained savagery are matched and overmatched by tales of towering courage, self-sacrifice and endurance. There was gripping high adventure, inspirational patriotism, the meanest treason, great, belly-laugh humor, tragedy, death, enormous sadness. The toughest, most pragmatic men tell of the power of prayer, are convinced they are the beneficiaries of miracles, and are convincing about it.

Onstage, too, came supporting and bit players, including "Fidel,"

a brutal Latin torturemaster whom the prisoners believe to be Cuban; a visiting American professor who insisted to one POW: "No son of a bitch like [then Secretary of State] Dean Rusk can tell me where to go!"; three American women, members of a visiting peace delegation, who described an Air Force pilot to his captors as "wayward," for which he was beaten and cruelly tortured; another, well-meaning lady, a famous American novelist who was permitted a visit with the famous Air Force ace, Col. Robinson Risner and unwittingly caused Risner hours of difficulty; Wilfred Burchett—"Wellfed Bullshit," the POWs called him—the Australian journalist who reports communist wars from the communist side. And others.

And much more. The hellish jungle prison camps of South Vietnam and Cambodia, where living conditions always were worse and the treatment as bad as and worse than in Hanoi. In these camps, too, injuries and disease often went untreated, there was deliberate starvation, torture, murder, and again humor and survival. Americans ought to know how their fellow Americans endured in these camps, how they lived and died in them.

That is why the work was done. The American POW experience in Vietnam is part of our heritage, and Americans ought to know about it.

I had anticipated that at times the work would become profoundly depressing. After sitting through many long interviews in which some of the best and toughest men I have ever known cried as they remembered, I expected that the writing would involve some especially long and lonely hours. But, oddly perhaps, depression never came. I looked forward every day to getting back at it. Nor was there any hangover depression when it was finished. I think this may have been due to the fact that essentially it is such a positive story, above all else a story of a great American performance at a time, on her 200th birthday, when America needs badly to know how great she still can be.

JGH

of him, it would be difficult for him to stop; it would be like turning a ratchet backward.

At Elf's signal Lantern Jaw pulled the prisoner's arms behind him and squeezed the torture cuffs back onto the tender, swollen wrists, ratcheting them down to the last notch, against the bone. Then he threw him to the floor and tied him into torture ropes. This was his first experience with "the rope trick." The pain was excruciating, but he promised himself that he would not give the enemy the satisfaction of hearing him cry out, and he did not.

He suffered in silence, sweating through his clothing, for perhaps half an hour. Then the ropes and cuffs were removed. The wrists were a shredded, bloody mess; strips and pieces of purplish skin hung from them. The same questions were put to him again; again he refused to answer. This time the cuffs were applied diagonally, across the wristbones, adding a degree of pain Jim would not have believed possible.

He lasted for perhaps fifteen minutes before agreeing to talk. The ropes and cuffs were left on him as he was dragged to a stool, seated upon it, and the questions put to him again. After providing information he knew the enemy already had he was stashed in solitary in the Carriage House and locked in leg irons. He was urged to write a paper explaining why the United States was in Vietnam. He wrote, "The United States is in South Vietnam to stop the spread of militant Communism in Southeast Asia." This seemed to be accepted and he was left alone. One day he sat on a sawhorse in his cell, looking through a crack in the door, and he saw the man the other prisoners called Fidel. He was a husky, good-looking man, and he certainly appeared to be Latin. In times to come, Kasler was going to get to know Fidel far better than he would have liked.

"One of your countrymen is here to talk to you," said Dum Dum to Jack Bomar. Bomar had seen no visitors since the previous March, when he had been duped into seeing the French doctor Krivitz, the Belgian lawyer Cornil, and Neilands, the American professor from Berkeley who had referred to Dean Rusk as a "son of a bitch." In fact, since the end of June, Bomar had been in solitary in the Pigsty and had not seen much of anyone. Now Dum Dum was making it clear he was going to see this "countryman."

"You will be polite," Dum Dum advised. "If you are not polite, if

you embarrass the Vietnamese people, you will be severely punished."

He was presented to Fidel, who impressed him. He was well dressed, in a sport shirt and slacks, and, despite his accent, had good command of English. Bomar assumed him to be a Latin American.

Fidel was stern with the prisoner. He spoke of the "grave crimes" the United States was perpetrating against "the peaceful Vietnamese people," who were "trying to unify their fatherland." He assured Bomar that he was a "criminal from the day you hit the ground," and not entitled to the protection of the Geneva Convention. Therefore, Bomar was to be "tried for your crimes by the Vietnamese people."

"I can help you with your defense," Fidel said, "but you will have to be very honest with me. Are you an honest man?"

Bomar confided that he was, to be sure, honest.

"Good," said Fidel, "because I want to give you a break."

After perhaps an hour of this, Bomar was returned to his cell. He was shaken. Like most of the POWs, he had heard many threats that the Americans were all to be tried, but it had always been said in a general, unconvincing way. But this had been specific—Fidel had left no doubt that Bomar was to be placed on trial. He was scared.

The next night, a Friday, he was again brought before Fidel. The Latin reminded him that he had claimed to be honest and said that now he was going to give him a chance to prove it. He produced a pad of paper and a pencil. He numbered the pages, from "1" to "20," handed the pad and pencil to Bomar, and said, "Write all you know about the EB-66 aircraft. They don't really need this, intelligence-wise. They know all about the airplane. This is just to prove you are honest so that I can trust you and help you in your trial."

Bomar was given the weekend to compose the essay. The EB-66 was an electronic intelligence collector, used in North Vietnam to locate SAM sites and communications centers for attack by other aircraft. Bomar had been navigator aboard one when it had been shot down. He was frightened. He certainly could not provide any military information. He spent the weekend wondering whether to write twenty pages of nonsense—or nothing. Fidel had impressed him as being smart and might not be fooled by nonsense; and he was tough—he might not put up with nonsense, or with nothing. He worried, and wondered what Ed Hubbard was going to do, or had done. Air Force Lt. Edward Lee Hubbard, another EB-66 navigator, had been downed on July 20, 1966, and Bomar assumed that Fidel,

who seemed to want EB-66 information, was also pressuring him.

All day Sunday, guards kept looking into Bomar's cell, pointing to the empty paper that lay on his bunk and warning him that he had better start writing. He wondered desperately how to reach Ed Hubbard. If they could get together on their stories, they stood a good chance of selling spurious information; but if their stories contradicted each other, they would both be in serious trouble.

Hubbard occupied a cell in the middle of the Stable, just to the north of the Pigsty, adjacent to the Pool Hall. A bamboo wall now stood between the Pigsty and the Stable, and there was no possibility of communicating directly with Hubbard. Bomar tried an end run. Early on Monday morning he started tapping his wall. His message quickly reached the cell at the northwesternmost end of the Pigsty. From here, it was hand-flashed, beneath the gap at the bottom of the cell door to the cell at the southwestern corner of the Pool Hall, just to the north, where the bamboo wall did not block the view between these cells. The message was then tapped from the southwesternmost Pool Hall cell to the cell directly behind it, at the Pool Hall's southeasternmost corner. From here, it was flashed across the courtyard to the Stable. In the Stable, it was tapped along to Hubbard. Hubbard responded immediately.

Bomar had surmised correctly. Fidel had already grilled Hubbard on the EB-66, and the other navigator had provided nonsense.

Fidel was not present for Bomar's Monday interrogation. The prisoner presented the interrogator with various childish sketches of an aircraft. He had drawn arrows to various of the appendages, describing them as "wheel," "wing," "window," "tail," and "fuselage." The interrogator was not amused. Bomar was returned to his cell and ordered to gather up his gear.

He was moved into a cell in the Stable with Ray Vohden and Air Force Maj. David Duart, who had been shot down on February 18, 1967. Bomar was appalled at the condition of Vohden's right leg. During shootdown, nearly two and a half years earlier, the Navy pilot's right shinbone had been snapped just above the ankle. There had been a good deal of amateur carpentry on the injury, and now about three inches of the shinbone were missing. Vohden had suffered a lot of infection in the leg, and was still in considerable pain and on crutches.

Vohden and Duart also had been interrogated by Fidel and did not know what to make of him. All were nervous about the Latin. Vohden said, "I think we're in deep shit."

Deep trouble, indeed, for about a dozen POWs who were now entering into a terror that came to be known as the Fidel Program.

By September 15, the round-the-clock harassment of Larry Guarino and Ron Byrne had continued for a full month. Every few minutes during the day, guards entered their cell to slap and punch them about; at night they were locked into torture cuffs and leg irons and tied down to the benches, sometimes with the lower legs extended beyond the end, with heavy iron bars laid across them. Then the guards kept looking in to make sure they did not sleep. Except for moments when they had been knocked unconscious or had simply passed out, they had not been able to steal much sleep—Guarino estimated that he had had perhaps an hour and a half during the entire month. The two prisoners were in indescribable misery. They were on the edge of nervous breakdowns. During the days, when the cuffs and leg irons were off, they would sit together between beatings and embrace each other, and cry, and console each other, and pray together. Then, when a month had passed, they were separated, and both went into solitary confinement.

"If you want to show a good attitude," Dum Dum told Guarino, "you should write a letter to your wife."

An unusual suggestion! Larry hoped it meant they had given up on torturing him. In any case, he was willing to write Evelyn. Dum Dum provided writing materials, saying, "Now, I will tell you exactly want to write!"

> Dear Wife:
>
> I am feeling fine, and now you must answer certain questions. Number One, what is the extent of the anti-war movement in the U.S. of A? Number Two, what is the extent of the black militant movement in the U.S. of A? How long do you think it will take for the black movement to stop the bombing of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam?
>
> /s/ Your Loving Husband,
> Lawrence

Dum Dum exhibited pride in having extracted this letter from the stingy Guarino. Larry could not believe Evelyn would ever see it. Surely, one of the pompous waste collector's superiors would have to read it and would junk it instantly, recognizing how ludicrous it sounded. Apparently Guarino guessed right, for the letter never reached Evelyn.

After ten days Guarino and Byrne were reunited. They were together only a few minutes when they were marched off separately for complete physical examinations by a doctor. Returning to the cell, Byrne muttered ruefully, "C.F.T., Larry. Cleared for torture."

It began the next morning and continued throughout that day and night. Both were badgered for the confessions they had failed to yield during the previous month. They continued to resist and that night they were locked again in torture cuffs and leg irons. The following morning Guarino was taken to interrogation. He again refused to confess. Byrne was brought into the room in time to see Larry ordered down onto his knees. There were fifteen to twenty guards in the room. At a signal from Dum Dum all of them began savagely beating Guarino. Soon he was insensible. Byrne was moved to another interrogation room.

When Guarino regained consciousness, Dum Dum ordered him tied into torture ropes. Again, consciousness slipped away fast. When he awakened, the ropes were being removed. He saw some women at the door. Their faces were contorted with hatred for him, and they were urging the torturers on. Guarino was made to kneel. Dum Dum came around from behind his desk, sliding a bullet into the chamber of a pistol. "Now I give you your last chance," he said. "If you do not confess, I kill you."

He held the pistol to Larry's temple. "Confess, Guarino, or I kill you."

Larry looked up at him. Death seemed so inviting. Quietly, he answered, "Please, do me a favor, will you?"

Dum Dum seemed to understand and became enraged. Larry never knew what hit him, a fist or the hand holding the pistol. There was another painful explosion in his head. He rolled on the floor all the way across the room. Dum Dum followed him, kicking him and yanking him up to punch at him. Then Larry was again tied into torture ropes. Dum Dum grabbed him by the hair and said, "Now I give you opportunity. You can speak. Say anything. Go ahead. I allow you to speak."

Guarino was drained, whipped, a sodden lump of aching, despairing humanity. But some warrior instinct surged, induced an alertness, insisted on further resistance. Through eyes blurred with bloody sweat and hatred, Larry regarded the little sadist, understood that the offer to let him speak was to establish the groundwork that would enable Dum Dum to save face before an audience that had failed to

see him extract a confession from the prisoner. Guarino knew that no matter what he said, Dum Dum, the only Vietnamese present who knew any English at all, would advise the onlookers that the prisoner had confessed. Larry lowered his head and remained silent. Furious, Dum Dum smashed him again.

Guarino was rope-tortured four times that day, with brutal beatings sandwiched in between. He did not confess. At last, when there seemed nothing left to do with him but to kill him, Dum Dum ordered a guard to give him a cigarette, explaining this to Larry as an example of the humanity of the Vietnamese people. Guarino, a heavy smoker, tossed the cigarette aside. A guard was ordered to return him to his cell. On the way, another guard approached, demanding that the American criminal bow. Larry was too weak. He was beaten senseless.

He was barely strong enough to sit up on his bed pallet when Ron Byrne returned, looking like a wet, bloody, dirty rag. The two prisoners hugged each other and cried, and described their all-too-similar days. The next morning they were separated. Each had a long way to go before torture would end, but now he was to journey alone.

"I'm tired of fucking with you," Fidel snarled to Jack Bomar, seated before him on a low stool. "This is it. You're either going to surrender or I'm gonna surrender you like you've never been surrendered before. It's up to you, you make your choice. Which is it?"

Bomar shook his head. "No way," he said firmly.

"Okay," said Fidel, nodding to Magoo, who was standing over the prisoner. Magoo sent Bomar sprawling with a roundhouse blow to the head. This particular room had many windows, and these were crowded with the eagerly interested faces of spectators, guards and women who worked in the camp. They seemed settled for a good show.

Fidel had initiated his association of the "Fidel group" of POWs like a Westerner who espoused Oriental ways. On coming before him, prisoners were required to bow deeply, and when they failed to do so were required to back up, come through the door, and bow again. They were made to sit before the Latin on a low stool or on the floor. "That's where criminals should sit," he would say, "there in the dirt."

Fidel kept a silver cigarette case and a matchbox on his desk, and

would tell prisoners, "You're gonna be the cigarette case, or you're gonna be the box of matches. Now it's your choice. If you're the box of matches, you're gonna be punished so badly that you're gonna beg me to be this case." At each meeting, Fidel would push the matchbox away from the cigarette case and observe that Bomar was the matchbox, heading for serious trouble. "You're either gonna surrender completely, or you're not," he explained. Then, leaning forward, he would confide, "Let me tell you, you *are* going to surrender to the Vietnamese people! You *will* surrender! You will do anything you are asked to do. Anything!"

This went on for weeks. Fidel kept the prisoners off balance. He came in a different mood to every meeting. He would quiz, cajole, warn, threaten. Sometimes, angrily, he ordered a guard to slap the prisoner about the room. Sometimes he confided that there was to be an early release, that a prisoner was to be sent home, implying that the men with whom he was dealing were under consideration.

Once Fidel told Bomar, "Today you will make a tape to that fucker, Lyndon Johnson. That fucker ought to be sitting there instead of you. You will tell President Johnson your views on the war."

Bomar stalled for long minutes, dreaming up a meaningless message to put on the tape. Finally ready, he picked up the microphone and turned on the recording switch. Fidel intervened, turned the machine from "Record" to "Play," and Bomar found himself listening to a Frank Sinatra tape. "What are you trying to do, ruin this beautiful tape?" Fidel laughed.

Bomar was allowed to hear several Sinatra ballads. Fidel sat laughing at him, at how funny it had been to watch him sweating it out when he had thought he was going to have to make a tape for "that fucker, Johnson."

Bomar and other Fidel POWs surmised that the Latin did not want to torture them; torture was dangerous, because it could yield propaganda that backfired, like the Clark Kent–Ben Casey confession. Fidel's mission, it was speculated, was to make the Americans cooperative without physically torturing them; to break them to Hanoi's will with some sort of psychological attack. To be sure, the Latin was keeping Bomar nervous. Bomar set himself on defeating his antagonist, on forcing Fidel to torture him for anything he got from him.

As the weeks passed and Fidel continued to come up empty from his bouts with the Americans, he became increasingly impatient and

nasty. Clearly, he was running out of time. He had to show some results, and soon.

Now, the sparring had ended. At Fidel's signal, Magoo sent Bomar sprawling, now put him back on the stool and teed off on him perhaps ten times. The crowd loved it; they babbled, happily. The blows stunned, but Bomar did not lose consciousness. A rage built up inside him. There was a pause in the proceedings, as Fidel explained, "These are really rough people you're dealing with!"

Bomar looked around, making no effort to hide his contempt.

"I told you one time I was gonna give you a break," Fidel said. "Okay, today I give you a break." He reached to the floor, picked up a set of leg irons, and slammed them on the desk. Then he slammed a pair of torture cuffs beside them. "You wouldn't make the choice between the cigarette case and the matchbox. Now I allow you to choose. Which will it be? If you choose the manacles, I guarantee I will break both your wrists. The leg irons are not going to be too bad."

Bomar, who had broken an ankle during shootdown, was not interested in the leg irons. "I'll take the manacles."

"You make a big mistake. You're the dumbest guy. You should never do that."

The cuffs were ratcheted on tight, and then he was tied into torture ropes—the green rappelling straps were used. Fidel stood by watching, and as the pain tore into Bomar, a rage seemed to mount in the Latin. Suddenly he slapped the tortured prisoner in the face and shouted, "*Surrender!*"

Bomar did not answer. Fidel slapped him again. "*Surrender!*"

The prisoner kept silent.

Another hard slap. "*Surrender!*"

A rhythm developed, and the spectators became caught up in it, chanting and shouting excitedly. A guard stepped in and dug the fingers of one hand deep into the prisoner's throat; he had a grip on the windpipe and seemed intent on pulling it out of him—he was crushing it, choking him.

"*There are four things I won't do,*" Bomar had once told Fidel. "*I won't say anything against my country. I won't say anything against my President. I won't say anything against my family. And I won't say anything against my religion.*"

Angrily, Fidel had replied, "*There are four things you are going to do for me after I break you apart: You will speak against your*

country. You will speak against your President. You will speak against your family. And you will speak against your religion."

Bomar had known instantly that it had been a mistake to challenge the Latin and had felt a sick, sinking feeling, knowing that sooner or later Fidel surely would take such statements from him. The memory haunted him. Now, apparently, the time had come.

The guard kept tearing at his throat, choking him. Fidel kept slapping him and shouting, "*Surrender!*" On and on. Then, finally, Bomar, frantic for air, nodded. The Latin kicked the guard's hand away from his throat, and the ropes and cuffs were removed.

"I don't think you've had enough," said Fidel. "I'm too easy on you!" The Latin seemed to be seething, having difficulty containing his rage. He ordered the guards to administer an additional beating to the prisoner. When it was over, Bomar was stashed in solitary and locked into leg irons. He was bruised and bloody. His chest and shoulders ached, as though they had been torn apart, his arms were numb from the straps, and a tooth had been broken. He sat on the floor of the cell, thinking about the torture. It was not the worst day he had endured. The worst day had been the one he had spent in the cell the prisoners called the Ho Chi Minh Room, Cell #3, in the Auditorium. The open window in this cell had been close enough to the open window of Fidel's quiz room so that he had had to spend hours listening while Fidel and a torture crew worked on the crippled Ray Vohden. The badly injured Navy pilot was as tough-minded and tough as anyone Bomar had ever known, but Fidel had known how to make him scream. And there had been nothing, nothing that Bomar had been able to do to help him. Except pray.

Thus, one by one, the Fidel prisoners made war with the Latin. The American "criminals" "surrendered," but the Vietnamese could see that they were doing so only because of physical torture.

There now were some 480,000 U.S. combat troops in Vietnam. At home, America was polarizing on the war issue. For many, the Administration's purposes were clear-cut and vital; it seemed essential to halt the spread of communism in the world, and the farther the job could be done from America's shores, the better.

But for many others, the Administration's purposes remained unclear, and the price was too high and much too personal; too many American youngsters were being drafted to die in far-distant jungles. Nor did the immense sacrifice appear to be accomplishing much.

Certainly, it was not stemming the flow of enemy troops and supplies into South Vietnam; indeed, in this strange conflict American forces sometimes seemed unable even to defend themselves. One July midnight, for example, the Viet Cong delivered a devastating attack on the big airbase at Da Nang, killing twelve Americans, wounding forty-five others, and destroying eleven airplanes and a dozen helicopters—more than seven hundred American aircraft had now been lost.

Moreover, there was a great deal of hostility and confusion in high places. Antiwar congressmen were continually engaging in disagreeable public debates with members of the Administration. Administration supporters were accusing dissenters of appeasement, of aiding the enemy by their opposition, and of promoting "another Munich."

In September, General Nguyen Van Thieu and Premier Ky were elected President and Vice President of South Vietnam. They received nearly 35 percent of the vote, the rest of which was divided among ten civilian tickets. Civilian candidates charged election "irregularities," but a group of twenty distinguished Americans sent to observe by President Johnson disagreed. One of the twenty, Oregon's Gov. Thomas McCall, said the election was "as good as any in the United States," and the group reported to Johnson that it had found no evidence of election rigging.

United Nations Secretary General U Thant advised reporters of his fears that the world was witnessing the opening stages of World War III, described a Washington-Peking confrontation as "inevitable," and insisted that the U.S. air campaign against North Vietnam was the main obstacle to peace talks.

Gov. George Romney, a highly popular candidate for the 1968 Republican presidential nomination, revealed that during a 1965 visit to Vietnam, "I just had the greatest brainwashing that anyone can get . . . not only from the generals but also from the diplomatic corps over there."

25

Fidel, Kasler, and the Faker

At the Zoo, in Hanoi, the one whom the prisoners believed to be Cuban and whom they called Fidel had been busy. The prisoners were never to be certain of the Latin's mission, but they generally agreed that it was to teach the North Vietnamese how to handle captured American military men; and to learn as much as possible on the same subject on behalf of his own government, whatever it was.

Fidel had selected a dozen or so American prisoners and had dealt with them one by one. He attempted to browbeat the men into yielding military information and cooperating in Hanoi's propaganda campaign. It seemed clear, at first, that he did not want to brutalize the men; perhaps Hanoi's mysterious ally wanted to demonstrate that mind and will were more effective than hell cuffs and torture ropes. In any event, the prisoners judged this to be the case, and one by one set their own minds and wills to frustrate Fidel. And he thus proved unable to show his hosts, the Vietnamese, any results. Defeated, furious, he turned to savagery, directing horrendous torture and beatings. So intense was the mistreatment that each prisoner had finally acquiesced to Fidel's enraged demand to "Surrender!"

But not unconditionally. For example, the senior ranking officer of the group, Air Force Maj. Jack Bomar, a navigator, when asked to write on the Doppler method of navigating aircraft, produced two pages of spurious biography on "the system's inventor, a German named Erick Von Doppler, who used to listen to trains. . . ."*

Fidel insisted that the American criminals become more self-sufficient. Therefore, he said, they would raise their own fish. They were made to dig two "breeding ponds," each about ten feet long and four feet wide. When each hole had been filled with water, Fidel produced a supply of approximately 350 tiny fish, each perhaps an inch and a half long. These fish, Fidel explained, would grow to a length of three feet and would weigh twelve pounds.

When Fidel finished speaking, someone noticed that the water in the ponds was so muddy that the fish could not swim in it; they were clustering at the surface, dying. At Fidel's frantic commands, the prisoners tried to use mosquito nets to lift the fish out of their mud-baths. It didn't work; the netting engulfed the fish in sticky mud, and soon there was mud all over the prisoners, the guards, Fidel, and the yard. Washtubs were brought out. The prisoners descended into the mudpits with pails and bailed them out. They picked fish out of the mud, cleaned them off and threw them into the washtubs. About 120 fish were salvaged. Like the American prisoners, whom the fish were eventually supposed to nourish, the fish were to find themselves occupied mainly with survival. They were to do none of the spectacular growing Fidel predicted, and no American was ever to taste any of them.

Fidel was full of ideas for prisoner self-sufficiency. He decided that the inmates should build a bakery and bake their own bread. Two of his criminals, Norlan Daughtrey and Ed Hubbard, immediately represented themselves as bakery-building experts and were placed in charge of construction. The project consumed most of two months. A sort of mud-adobe oven was built, with a chimney about eight feet high. It was an impressive-looking structure, but midway through construction, an amazed Jack Bomar observed to Hubbard, "Ed, that will never work. You don't have the chimney connected with the oven."

"That's right," Hubbard mumbled, nodding vigorously. "Never work."

*The Doppler effect was discovered by Christian Johann Doppler, a nineteenth-century Austrian physicist.

The prisoners, while they enjoyed being outside, breathing fresh air, getting exercise and a chance to communicate with each other, had no intention of producing construction their captors were sure to cite as examples of Hanoi's "lenient and humane treatment."

As construction of the oven advanced, Daughtrey and Hubbard kept feeding Fidel's pride in the project, assuring him that his brainchild would produce more bread than the miracle of the loaves and fishes. When construction was completed, Fidel and the camp officials gathered before it for a ceremonious first-baking. Cooks built a fire. The fire immediately went out, and a large cloud of stinking, black smoke billowed forth and rolled into the sky. The prisoners and some anxious cooks fiddled for at least an hour with the oven, trying to get the fire going again. Finally Fidel stormed away. The Latin knew that somehow he had been had, but he never was to figure out why the bakery wouldn't work.

Fidel's prisoners made coal balls for cooking. These were about the size of snowballs and were made by kneading together coal dust, mud, and small amounts of water. When the going got slow, the prisoners complained that they needed additional help and more prisoners were asigned to the task. The communications network spread. Soon the Fidel prisoners knew the names of the entire inmate population of the Zoo and Zoo Annex, a prison compound that had been built directly behind the west wall of the Zoo.

The Fidel prisoners shared a large cell in the Stable and were allowed to speak to each other. One day, when the group returned from a work session, a message was flashed from the Pool Hall, a few yards to the west: "While you were gone, there was a lot of activity in your room and the room next to it. We could not see, but we heard an electric drill going all day."

The prisoners gathered in the center of the cell and, in whispered conversation, decided that Fidel probably had bugged the place. Silently, they went over the room inch by inch. They found nothing. Still, most felt certain that listening devices had been installed, that Fidel hoped to show the Vietnamese how to keep themselves abreast of prisoner communications. Then someone in the Pool Hall flashed a message that Fidel and two Vietnamese had just moved stealthily into the room next to them. The Fidel prisoners instantly devised a new communications policy: no talking about anything even remotely important. All such conversation was now to be hand-flashed back and forth across the room, or, when speed was essential softly whispered while others engaged in loud conversation about innocuous matters.

One day Fidel, clearly frustrated, blurted to Jack Bomar, "Everytime you want to talk about something important, you talk secret. Everything else is very loud!"

For the most part, however, life with Fidel was worse than grim. Once, when the Fidel prisoners were divided into small groups and taken off to different work projects, Bomar and Daughtrey found themselves listening to the sounds of an awful beating being administered inside a stall in a small bath area. It went on and on, amidst shrieks of unrestrained rage and the sounds of fists and other things smashing against flesh and bone. The noise chilled the blood and spirit. After a long time, Fidel emerged from the stall and, spotting Bomar, shouted, "We've got a fucker that's faking! Nobody's gonna fake and get away with it!" The Latin launched on a lengthy tirade, describing how the prisoner had been pretending illness and injury to avoid interrogation and work. "I'm gonna teach you all a lesson," he vowed. "I'm gonna break this guy in a million pieces! He's gonna eat, he's gonna bow, he's gonna work, he's gonna do everything we say! He's gonna surrender, just like all of you surrendered!"

A Vietnamese guard brought the man from the stall. The sight of the prisoner stunned Bomar; he stood transfixed, trying to make himself believe that human beings could so batter another human being. The man could barely walk; he shuffled slowly, painfully. His clothes were torn to shreds. He was bleeding everywhere, terribly swollen, and a dirty, yellowish black and purple from head to toe. The man's head was down; he made no attempt to look at anyone. He was taken into the cell the Fidel prisoners shared, and Fidel grabbed Bomar by the arm and hustled him in, too, ordering him to "Shake hands with your comrade!" Bomar introduced himself, offering his hand. The man did not react. He stood unmoving, his head down. Fidel smashed a fist into the man's face, driving him against the wall. Then he was brought to the center of the room and made to get down onto his knees. Screaming in rage, Fidel took a length of black rubber hose from a guard and lashed it as hard as he could into the man's face. The prisoner did not react; he did not cry out or even blink an eye. His failure to react seemed to fuel Fidel's rage and again he whipped the rubber hose across the man's face.

Bomar was nearly physically ill at what he saw happening, and at his helplessness to stop it. Again and again and again, a dozen times, Fidel smashed the man's face with the hose. Not once did the fearsome abuse elicit the slightest response from the prisoner. Bomar

began to realize that the man was not really there, that somehow his brain had tuned out the pain and damage—and everything else. At last, Fidel ordered, "Take him down and clean him up!"

Bomar helped the battered prisoner to a bath stall. In the stall was a concrete tank containing some dirty water, and a pail. Bomar had some soap. He got the man undressed and found that he had been through much more than the day's beatings. His body was ripped and torn everywhere; hell cuffs appeared almost to have severed the wrists, strap marks still wound around the arms all the way to the shoulders, slivers of bamboo were embedded in the bloodied shins and there were what appeared to be tread marks from the hose across the chest, back, and legs. Horrified, Bomar was afraid to touch him, for fear of causing him more pain. He spoke softly, trying to comfort the man, to let him know that he was now in friendly hands, that he wanted to help him and make him comfortable.

The man did not react. He did not open his eyes or say anything. He simply sat, head down. Gently, Bomar cleaned him up as best he could. Then, suddenly, Fidel burst into the stall, grabbed Bomar, pushed him out of the place, and began beating the man again. He kept driving his fist into his face, slamming him against the walls and down onto his knees. Then he stalked away, leaving Bomar to get him back to the cell.

The other Fidel prisoners returned from their work details. As Bomar described what had happened, the new man remained mute, his head down, his eyes closed, his teeth clenched tightly together. It was as though he were alone in a world of his own. None of the others knew him or anything about him. All that was known was that he was an American, that unspeakable horrors had been done to him, and that he needed all the solace and help they could provide.

His belongings were delivered. His blankets and clothing were covered with dried blood, pus, and waste matter. A bed was made for him and he was made to lie down. The others discussed what to do. Somehow he had to be brought back from wherever it was that Fidel and his colleagues had driven him. He needed to be kept clean, to be fed, and to be nursed back to physical and mental health.

The bowing program was in full swing. Guards were opening cells dozens of times daily just for the pleasure of seeing the American criminals bow to them. The Fidel prisoners lost no time coming to their feet and bending in obeisance, but the new arrival would not so much as acknowledge that the cell door had opened. Unfailingly, the

offended guard would stride to his bunk, grab him by the neck of his shirt, pull him up, and slap him hard across the face. The others winced with every blow; some muttered fears for their own sanity if the assault on the man continued.

The man would say nothing and do nothing. The others took turns feeding him, trying to talk to him, soothing him, and offering encouragement. He ate, and at length he opened his eyes. But he kept his head down, staring blankly, and kept his silence, keeping his teeth clenched tightly when he was not eating.

Then, suddenly, he spoke. Somehow, someone had come by a banana—a prize!—and proposed to feed it to him. Through teeth that remained clenched, he said, "There is a microphone in the banana."

The others gathered round, certain that a turning point had been reached and that important ground was about to be gained. Eagerly they broke the banana open in front of him, showing that there was no microphone in it. He refused to accept this, and refused to eat the banana. Again he fell silent, unresponsive.

Days later, he spoke again, muttering as if to himself, that the room seemed to be full of people who "look like Americans."

"We *are* Americans," Bomar assured him. "We have gone through a lot of what you have gone through. We are all in the same boat."

"They changed your hands," the man replied. "They changed your face. They needed your face and hands. There are gas jets in the wall."

"Our hands are okay. . . ."

"You are all Russians, Russian actors on a stage. The sun goes too fast. There it goes, across the sky."

Now he refused to eat. Bomar and the others could get nowhere with him. Only occasionally would he say, "I know what you are doing. I know you want my hands. I know you are going to kill me. Why don't you go ahead and do it? Kill me."

"He's faking!" raged Fidel. The Latin took the man out onto the porch of the Stable along with Bomar, to warn him that he had to stop faking. The man did not answer. He stared downward, behaved as though Fidel were not present. Fidel's rage mounted. He ranted at the man, screaming. "He's faking. I know he's faking, and I'm gonna prove it!"

The man was removed to a hospital.

The events of March 31, 1968, the halting of the American air campaign against North Vietnam and President Johnson's announcement that he would not seek another term in the White House were trumpeted to the American POWs as evidence that Hanoi's cause was prevailing. The antiwar movement was succeeding beyond expectations. There was no other way to interpret events.

Generally, however, the American prisoners interpreted the news differently. Most took it for granted that the Communists had come to terms with Johnson, that some sort of acceptable agreement had been reached, that the war was in its climactic stages, and that they soon would be home. The prisoners were full of optimism. Typically, Jack Bomar found himself speaking freely to one whom the prisoners called Pancho. Pancho, too, was Latin, of average height, but powerfully built and with a big, shaggy black beard. Whatever his purpose in Hanoi, he was not an interrogator. He merely wanted to talk to Americans, and sought Bomar's reaction to the bombing halt.

"The President didn't stop the bombing without concessions," Bomar told him. "There is no doubt in my mind about that. And I'm the concession. I don't know what the other concessions are, but the release of the POWs is primary. We'll be out of here within ninety days."

Fidel entered the room where Pancho and Bomar were talking just as the American uttered the word "concessions." He grabbed Bomar by the shoulder and threw him to the floor, roaring furiously, "*Concessions?* Never! The Vietnamese have absolutely defeated the United States. You will never leave here!"

The next morning Bomar was summoned from the cell. The long Stable porch was crammed with Vietnamese, armed guards and men and women who worked around the camp. Bomar knew he was in for a brutal session. He was made to kneel on the ground, hands in the air. Fidel strode before him, delivering a long, angry lecture on "concessions." At last he said, "Now, we are going to teach you what concessions really are!" With that he drove a roundhouse blow straight into Bomar's face, sending him sprawling. Guards brought him back up onto his knees. Again Fidel smashed him in the face, and again the prisoner was brought back up onto his knees.

The spectators appreciated the show, laughing and shouting encouragement to Fidel.

Now the Latin stepped behind Bomar with the length of rubber hose and lashed him hard, just below the kidneys. Then a second

blow. Bomar was down again, writhing in the dirt, wondering how much of the rubber hose he could stand. He was yanked up onto his knees again, and Fidel was screaming for Daughtrey.

Daughtrey was made to kneel in the dirt beside Bomar. Fidel smashed a fist into his face, guards pulled him back onto his knees, and Fidel lashed him across the back with the hose. Then the Latin stood behind Bomar again, lashed him again with the hose, and screamed for Rice (Navy Ens. Charles D. "Chuck" Rice, captured on October 26, 1967). Rice was smashed in the face and lashed with the hose. Then, again, Fidel stood behind Bomar and laid the hose across his back.

One by one, each of the Fidel prisoners was brought before the crowd, made to kneel, smashed in the face, and lashed once with the rubber hose. Each time, Bomar was lashed once again.

At last the physical punishment ended. The Americans all were on their knees, their hands high. Down the steps came Lump, the Zoo camp commander. He walked to Bomar, poked a finger close to his face, and shouted, "Jackasses, these are your concessions!" Then he disappeared.

The prisoners were kept on their knees for perhaps thirty minutes while Fidel harangued them, warned them to put out of their minds any thoughts that they might be leaving soon. Then all but Bomar were ordered back into their cell. Bomar was treated to additional histrionics, and finally Fidel smashed him sprawling one last time and ordered him back to the cell.

After most of two weeks, the man whom Fidel said was "faking" was returned from the hospital to the cell the Fidel prisoners shared in the Stable. He was an unkempt, malodorous mess. He had several huge boils on his back and hip. The camp medic, a Vietnamese whom the prisoners called Slasher, tore the cores out of the boils. Using some sort of rusty instrument, he cut deeply, drawing blood, ripping out patches of skin and draining pus. The prisoner never winced. When the medic left, the others ground up sulfa pills they had begged and stashed away and dusted the powder into the gaping wounds.

Within a few weeks many of the group were covered with boils. Ed Hubbard had more than two hundred, from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. He was in an agony that worsened when he moved;

he could not walk, sit, or lie down without causing himself terrible pain. Still, he kept moving, helping with the cleanup chores, trying to take care of himself.

Bomar had forty-four boils, including four in one armpit and an especially painful one on a little finger. Using a bamboo needle he opened this one to drain it. Soon angry red streaks painted the arm, signaling blood poisoning. He became terribly ill. Slasher carved into the little finger, the poison flew out of it, and the illness receded.

Amazingly, Larry Spencer, who was waiting hand and foot on the "Faker," developed no boils. He scrubbed the man's clothing, bathed him, and stayed close to him, tending to his every need, but remaining free of infection. He kept looking after the man in the face of enormous frustration.

The bowing program remained in effect, and the guards enforced it with what the prisoners called "fan belts"—actually rubber whips cut out of old tires. One day the door to the Fidel prisoners' cell opened thirty-nine times, requiring seventy-eight bows, one each time a guard entered, a second when he indicated that he was leaving. All delivered these bows except the Faker. Each time he failed to bow, the offended guard would slap him, punch him, or lash the rubber whip across his face. His face and head were ripped bloody, but he never once gave the slightest indication that he felt any of these blows.

The others kept caring for the man, worrying about him, worrying about their own abilities to maintain emotional stability while being forced to witness such grisly treatment and wondering how to stop the slow murder. SRO Bomar pleaded with Fidel time and again to make the Latin believe the truth, that the man was not faking, that no one who was faking could suffer such punishment without reacting. "Give up on him," Bomar urged. "Let us take care of him."

Fidel would have none of it. "The fucker is faking," he insisted. And the horror continued. Apparently Fidel needed some "victories." He remained determined to break the Faker, to win his "surrender."

"The food has gotten much better," the interrogator Spot observed, smiling, to Jim Kasler. Kasler, the Korean War ace who had led the first strikes against Hanoi's oil depots two years earlier, studied Spot. He knew him to be a sadist, and judged him to be homosexual. He

hated him, with a quiet, intense hatred, and knew that the feeling was mutual. He wondered why Spot was attempting to be friendly; why the smile and the inane conversation?

Suddenly Spot announced: "My major has directed me to find a man to meet a delegation and make a TV appearance on the occasion of the downing of the 3,000th enemy airplane over our country. And so who should I think of but you, of course, which is quite an honor for you."

"Bullshit. I'm not going to see any goddamn delegation."

"You have no choice. You are in our hands now. We have kept you alive, now you owe this to us."

"I owe you nothing." Kasler was terribly ill from the infection in his leg. Nonetheless, he had been subjected to prolonged, brutal torture and beatings. Only recently, Spot had beaten him to a pulp, then had kept him on his knees for the rest of the day, allowing him a five-minute rest break each hour because of his leg infection. This, the sadist had explained, was in keeping with the humane and lenient treatment.

Spot got up to leave the room, handing Kasler an English-language Vietnam *Courier*. Kasler read of the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. He was trying to digest this shocking news, when Spot returned to demand his "final decision." Kasler advised that he already had it. He would make no appearances, before people or cameras.

Spot clapped him in the Ho Chi Minh Room, the filthy, darkened cell in the Auditorium. The next day he was summoned again to interrogation. The table was laden with torture paraphernalia—ropes, leg irons, and three different sets of cuffs, all of them different sizes.

"You can torture me, you can drag me before that delegation," Kasler said, "but I'm not going to say a goddamn word when I get there. And I'm not making a TV appearance."

Spot supervised the torture. Lump came in to observe, as guards lashed Kasler's arms behind him so that the backs of the wrists met, and hell cuffs were ratcheted on down to the bones. Then ropes were pulled on, bone-tight, from the elbows to the shoulders and his arms pulled tightly together. The prisoner suffered this excruciation in silence. Spot kept urging him to put an end to his discomfort; all he need do was agree to meet with a delegation.

Kasler tried to concentrate on not thinking about the awful pain in his wrists; other prisoners, he knew, found the pain in the shoulders and chest to be the worst, but for him the hell cuffs were the worst.

After perhaps forty-five minutes, the cuffs and ropes were removed, and Kasler was made to kneel for a beating. Then another, smaller set of hell cuffs was ratcheted on. The pain was worse this time; after about half an hour it was intolerable, and he lost consciousness. When he awakened, the cuffs were being removed. He was allowed fifteen minutes' rest, then was given another beating. Hell cuffs were reapplied and this time, somehow, the pain was intensified. He passed out within a few minutes.

"Do you surrender? Do you surrender?" Spot was asking him when he regained consciousness. The cuffs had been removed. A guard stood over him, holding them.

Sick, bathed in pain, Kasler could take no more. He muttered, "Okay, I surrender."

Abruptly, the torture guard pulled him up onto his knees, pulled his arms behind him, and ratcheted the cuffs back onto his wrists, down to the bones. Again he passed out.

He was awakened and again asked, "Do you surrender?"

Again he surrendered, but again it was as though he had not spoken; again he was tortured to unconsciousness. This happened several times. At last the torture guard pulled him up onto his knees, threw a rope around his neck, and began garroting him. Unable to breathe, he lost consciousness. He awakened to find the guard slapping his face, and Spot continuing to ask, "Do you surrender?"

"Yes," he said again. Finally the torture ended. Kasler judged that he had been tortured as long and as intensively after first saying that he surrendered as he had been before.

It took him several hours to regain the use of his hands. Then he was instructed to copy out the questions that would be put to him, and the answers he was to supply:

> *Q.* Who captured you?
> *A.* Mostly unarmed women and children.
> *Q.* What have you observed since you have been in this camp?
> *A.* I have seen hundreds of new prisoners arrive in this camp, and it is obvious that our bombing has been fruitless because Vietnamese production is up on all fronts. We now get fruit, sugar, beer and a lot of extras with our diet.

Another question required that he assert that the United States was waging an "illegal, immoral and unjust war."

On July 2, he was brought before Lump, who advised that Kasler would be presented to a visiting delegation. Kasler replied, "You can

torture me all you want and take me before the delegation, but when I get there I'm not going to say a goddamn word."

Lump pushed a set of glossy photographs across the table, inviting Kasler to look at them. These were pictures of large antiwar demonstrations in the United States. Protesters held high placards inscribed "End the War," "Stop the Slaughter," "Get the Troops Out," even "Communist Party USA." But in one photograph Kasler spotted two elderly gentlemen wearing American Legion caps who had worked their way into the middle of a howling, antiwar mob. They smilingly held up a placard inscribed "Drop the Bomb." Grinning, Kasler repeated that he would not be cooperative in any appearance he was forced to make before a delegation. Confused, Lump returned him to the Ho Chi Minh Room.

The next dawn, July 3, the camp medic entered Kasler's cell to bandage his draining leg. Jim knew what this meant; it was always done prior to torture, to keep the blood and pus from staining the interrogation room.

Within an hour he was in torture. Lump entered, pulled up a stool, and sat down next to the prisoner's head. "Now, Kasler," he said, "I am going to enjoy this." Kasler was alternately put in hell cuffs and ropes, then beaten. Once, guards were standing on his wrists, trying to squeeze them into a smaller pair of cuffs, when a voice said, "Kasler!"

It was Fidel. Jim had seen him in the street once the previous September examining torture equipment and talking with Lump. And he had heard much about him from fellow prisoners. Now, it seemed, he was to be handed over to the Latin. Fidel reached down, grabbed Jim by the neck of his shirt, and shook him like a rag doll. "What do you think you're pulling, you motherfucker? What kind of shit are you trying to pull?"

Fidel seemed beside himself with rage. He kept screaming obscenities. Then he slammed the heel of his boot down into the center of Kasler's chest. Intense pain exploded up through the shoulder and down the arm to the hand. Jim gasped, fought for air, felt certain he was having a heart attack and was going to die.

Torture guards kept stuffing rags into his mouth. He had not cried out, but many did in torture, and the Vietnamese did not like it. He kept spitting the rags out onto the floor, and guards kept trying to replace them in his mouth. After a while, when he still had not screamed, they stopped trying to gag him.

"Why are you doing this, you motherfucker?" Fidel shrieked. "Why won't you cooperate?"

"You won't make a traitor out of me!" Kasler muttered. "You're not going to make me betray my country!"

After a while Fidel ordered the cuffs and ropes removed. Kasler sat at the table before him. "Who knows you're here?" the Latin asked.

"Nobody."

"Then why are you pulling this shit? You don't have to go through this. You'll go before the delegation."

"I refuse," Kasler said.

Shifting psychological gears, Fidel asked, "You want a drink of water?"

"Yes." Having sweated through the tortures, Jim was completely dehydrated.

Guards brought water. Fidel turned a small table fan on Kasler and gave him a cigarette. At length the Latin said, "Okay, when you go before the delegation . . ."

"Forget it," said Kasler. "I'm not doing anything."

"Back on your knees!" yelled Fidel.

Guards administered another beating. He was squeezed again into hell cuffs and torture ropes. He lay in agony, trying to concentrate on something other than the pain that assailed him. He tried to fling his mind into the past; he thought about pies his mother used to make, picnics with his wife and children. He recited the Lord's Prayer to himself, thinking through the meaning of each word and thought. Then Fidel was low on the floor next to him, asking, "Do you want to take a bath?"

"Yeah."

"Are you gonna surrender?"

"No."

He was taken out of torture. Fidel ordered him to go to the bath area, clean up, and "change those filthy clothes. You smell like a pig!"

Jim turned to leave. Fidel leaped from behind the table, grabbed him, whirled him about, and slapped him hard across the face. He pointed out that Kasler had started through the door ahead of one of the Vietnamese guards. "Show a little respect," said the Latin.

After the bath he was returned to the interrogation room. Kasler again advised Fidel he was not going before any delegation.

"On your knees!"

This time, after the hell cuffs were on, Jim's thumbs were wired together. Ropes were tied around his elbows. A guard stood in front of him, put a foot on his head to hold him down, and lifted his arms slowly, until they seemed to be in a ball behind his head. The pain was the worst he had known yet. It engulfed him, yet he could feel it all, the wires cutting the thumbs, the cuffs biting through the skin and into bone, the shoulders turning, turning, agonizingly, in a direction they were not meant to turn. But he did not cry out—he would not give his tormentors that satisfaction. And so it continued—and got worse. Even tighter torture cuffs were applied and fists were smashed repeatedly into his face.

He was returned to the Ho Chi Minh Room. There Lump met him with another guard who, having been awarded ten minutes to work over the prisoner, beat him unmercifully. That done, Kasler was made to kneel in the center of the floor, so that guards could observe him from the peephole in the cell door. He lost consciousness, fell, awakened, crawled toward his water jug. He needed water desperately. Before he could reach it, though, the cell door opened and a guard took the jug away. Kasler was made to get back onto his knees. He passed out several times. Each time, guards would enter, revive him, and get him back up onto his knees. Fidel arrived and made him lie face down on the wooden pallet that served as a bed. The Latin unlimbered a heavy rubber whip. Lifting it, he shouted, "The best way to survive is by being aggressive!" With that, he laid the lash across Kasler's buttocks. Then, "Strike the enemy first, before he has a chance to hit you!" Another lash. More quotes, from various newspaper and magazine interviews with Kasler prior to the ace's capture. Kasler writhed under the lash that slammed down into him over and over again. Lost in pain, Kasler paid no heed to what his torturer was saying. He counted the blows, fought down a mounting urge to scream, to vomit. The flogging went on and on, and he was unable to lose consciousness.

After thirty-six lashes, Fidel asked, "Are you going to surrender?"

"No."

"I'll talk to you tomorrow, you son of a bitch!"

Kasler's buttocks, lower back, and legs hung in shreds. The skin had been entirely whipped away and the area was a bluish, purplish, greenish mass of bloody raw meat. Lump came to warn, "Tomorrow, we show you the determination of the Vietnamese people!"

But the next day was July 4 and, in deference to the American

holiday, Fidel gave Kasler respite. He was given cigarettes, a beer, and a piece of peanut-brittle-like candy.

Early on the fifth, he was taken to an interrogation room. Fidel was not present, but the ropes were, and a pair of hell cuffs so small that it took the guards about thirty minutes to get them locked onto the emaciated prisoner's wrists. This pain exceeded all that had gone before. Kasler began to fear for his sanity. He was tied back into torture ropes, and his arms were pulled straight out behind him, then pulled upward, toward his shoulders. The ropes were drawn across his shoulders and down around his feet. Then they were pulled tight, until his toes were against his mouth. He remained tied into this agonized ball for a long time. Guards kept slapping him and punching him. He would not surrender. He knew that the torture that came after surrender lasted as long as that which preceded it.

After a long time he was returned to his cell and made to strip down to his shorts. He was locked in leg irons and made to sit on the bed pallet. His hands were left free but they were useless now. The wrists, torn and bloody, looked as though they had almost been severed by the hell cuffs, and the discolored hands and fingers remained so swollen that he could not move them.

That night guards stayed at his cell door, looking in on him every few minutes to make certain he did not lie down or sleep, and that he did not abuse the clouds of mosquitoes that feasted on him. He was kept like that all the next day and next night.

Then, early on the seventh, there was another session with Fidel. "I'll tell you what I'll do," said the Latin. "We'll give you a symbolic torture. I'll bring ten other POWs into this room and we'll torture you. They will see it, then you can surrender. Everyone will know you have been tortured and you will be an honorable man."

"Bullshit," said Kasler.

"You motherfucker!" Fidel shrieked. "You son of a bitch! What kind of shit are you trying to pull, you bastard?"

"I'll never surrender," said Kasler. It occurred to him that he had made a mistake, that he should have agreed to being tortured in front of ten other prisoners, then refused to surrender.

"All right," said Fidel, "you're going to go in front of that delegation if we have to carry you. Either that or I am going to beat you to death!"

That night he was again fed to the mosquitoes. At dawn the next morning, a Vietnamese guard whom the prisoners called Cedric en-

tered the cell. Cedric apparently had been assigned to Fidel as his batman, bootlicker, and errand boy; he fawned on the Latin, and Fidel despised him. Cedric had his own rubber whip. He ordered Kasler to lie on his stomach, then lashed him seven times across his already ravaged buttocks.

Kasler was made to remain in position on the bed pallet. For three days, every hour on the hour from 6 AM until 10 PM, Cedric would supervise as a different guard came to deliver three to four lashes with the rubber whip. Each time, Cedric would treat himself to an additional three to four lashes. Cedric always took his time, extracting enormous pleasure from the exercise and heaping upon the prisoner all the appellations he had heard his idol, Fidel, use on Kasler.

In the three days Kasler was flogged with approximately three hundred more lashes. When he was not being flogged, he was made to sit up on his terrible wounds. At night he was locked in leg irons, and was not allowed to sleep or to do anything against the mosquitoes and flies that were drawn to his blood.

During the flogging at noon on the third day, he knew he was going mad. Suddenly, involuntarily, he said, "I surrender." He had not meant to say it; some conspiracy of mind and body had overcome the will, and the words had escaped him, like a scream. It didn't matter. The flogging continued. He was flogged six more times that day. At each flogging Cedric kept saying, "My commander does not believe you. He believes you lie. Why do you lie?"

That evening he was made to sign a letter in which he assured his captors that he would do everything he was told to do "to the best of my ability." He was locked again in leg irons but he was given a mosquito net and allowed to sleep. The sleep restored him to the extent that by the next morning he was distraught with himself for having surrendered. But for the next several days he kept replying affirmatively when guards opened his peephole to ask if he still surrendered. He hurt so badly that he could not find it within himself to say something that might lead to a resumption of the torture.

Once the peephole opened and he was startled to see an American face. It was Jack Bomar who, along with other Fidel prisoners, was unloading a truck full of melons into another room in the Auditorium. The group had been wondering for days who it was that Fidel had in torture and now, with the guards all in sight and preoccupied, Bomar was finding out. He talked to Kasler for perhaps five minutes, then returned to tell the others who it was and to say, "He looks bad. Bad. Bad."

The guards kept coming to the cell, to ask Kasler if he still surrendered. One day he answered, "No."

Within minutes Cedric was in the cell with a crowd of guards. The prisoner was made to kneel with his hands behind his back, and the guards took turns slapping him in the face. Kasler was able to note that several younger guards were unable to contain their disgust at what they saw happening and stole away. The others enjoyed it. Cedric took out his rubber whip and flailed away at him, lashing with abandon across the face, chest, back, and legs. Kasler's left eardrum was ruptured and blood streamed down the side of his face and neck. Once, when he was driven off his knees and fell back against the bed pallet, a guard kicked him in the back; Jim felt a rib break, felt the sharp, breathtaking pain flood through him, overwhelming all the other pain. He rolled on the floor, his arms crossed over his chest, trying to protect himself as the guards continued to kick at him. The floor was puddled with blood and pus, most of it from his infected leg. The guards became aware that the leg was bleeding and draining, and began jumping up and down on it. Only half-conscious now, Jim felt a sharp pain above the hip, where the pin had been inserted down through the thighbone. The guards seemed caught up in a bloodlust; they kept screaming, kicking, and spitting at the prisoner. They would smash his head against the floor and occasionally would pull him to his knees to slug at his face. Periodically Cedric would manage to get the others to stand back so that he could lay away with the whip.

It went on and on, and the prisoner, weak and broken, wondered when death would come; he knew that he surely could not suffer such treatment much longer.

The savagery continued, though, and death did not come. The guards howled and slugged and kicked and spit and whipped, but the prisoner would not die. After what seemed like hours, he lay sprawled, in a stupor. He became aware of an intense physical struggle which did not involve him. Then, suddenly, he was alone. He surmised that other guards had been sent in to pull off those who had seemed bent on his destruction. He lay motionless, wondering whether that was good or bad—what else did the enemy have in store for him?

An hour passed. Guards entered and ordered him onto his knees, hands high in the air. The broken rib filled him with pain, and as he raised his hands this pain intensified. He was warned that if he failed to do as commanded, the beating would be resumed. He stayed on his

knees, hands high, until early evening—eight or nine hours. Then he collapsed. He did not lose consciousness. He fell to the floor and lay there, unable to move. Guards entered and threatened him.

"Go ahead and beat me," he muttered. "I don't care."

They lifted him onto his bed pallet, put down a sheet of paper. He wrote, as ordered, "I apologize for surrendering five times and taking back six."

He lay alone for several days in a semi-coma, uninterested in the meals that were shoved into the cell; in any case, his face was so terribly swollen that he could not open his mouth; it was as though his teeth had been cemented shut. Many of the teeth were broken.

Then he found himself in interrogation again, facing Fidel.

"Do you surrender?" the Latin asked.

"Yes."

He was taken to a bath area and allowed to shave and clean up. He was returned to his cell and a bowl of soup was brought to him. There was a large, hard lump in the broth. He poked at it, then lifted it out of the bowl. It was the head of a dog, complete with all the anatomical appurtenances—eyes, nose, ears, teeth, hair. He put the head aside and downed the broth.

There was another interrogation with Fidel in which Kasler replied affirmatively when asked if he still surrendered. That was the end of it. There were no demands to write anything, no insistence that he appear before a delegation. Fidel said, "We're going to take care of your leg."

Kasler said, "Bullshit. You haven't done anything for it for two years and you're not going to now."

Fidel insisted that treatment was in the offing. He tossed a package of Viceroy cigarettes and a package of Juicy Fruit gum on the table and told Kasler to take them. Kasler declined. Fidel grabbed him by the shirtfront and began shaking him. "You take 'em," he shouted, "or I'm gonna beat the shit out of you!" He took them.

He was moved into Cell #11 in the Pigsty. It helped immensely to be able to make contact with other Americans. His old friend and squadronmate, Air Force Capt. Norman L. (Norm) Wells, who had been flying with him the day he was downed and who had been captured himself three weeks later, asked, "Did you hear about Low, Carpenter, and Thompson?"

"No," said Kasler.

"They were released while you were in the Ho Chi Minh Room."

On August 2, the Vietnamese had released Jim Low and two other Air Force officers, Maj. Fred Neale Thompson and Capt. Joe Victor Carpenter, to American antiwar visitors.

Having failed to persuade Kasler to write an acceptable paper or to appear before a delegation, Fidel concentrated on breaking the Faker. Jack Bomar told Lump that if the brutal mistreatment of the man continued, he was certain to die. Lump would have none of it. The guards continued their horrendous physical abuse of the prisoner, slapping, punching, or flogging him with the rubber whip whenever he failed to bow. But he would not bow, and now he removed himself as far as possible from association with his fellow prisoners, whom he continued to regard as sinister. He went underneath his blanket, folded himself into a fetal position, and tried to stay there.

Bomar ordered the man to bow to the guards, to eat, to stop withdrawing. He would comply with none of these orders. The Fidel prisoners began dragging him from beneath his blanket and sitting him up on his bunk, against the wall. Men would sit on either side of him and would hold conversations across him on every subject they could think of, hoping that something someone said would capture his attention, draw him out, bring him back. Day after day, the men took him on in teams, talking, watching, waiting, hoping. Nothing worked; nothing was ever said that caused the slightest flicker of interest.

The men had better luck physically exercising him. They would take his arms and legs, push them so as to bend them at the joints, then pull them out. They would stand him up, walk him, sit him down, and force him to do sit-ups. Whatever the exercise, the man resisted strongly. For all concerned, it was a beneficial, sort of isometric, exercise.

Bomar decided that somehow the Vietnamese abuse of the man had to be stopped, that he had to be made to bow when the cell door opened. The others now learned that it is very difficult to bow the head of one who does not want to be bowed. Several men had to exert great effort to accomplish this, lifting him to his feet when a guard entered, then holding him so that one man could put a full nelson on him, hands looped under his arms and up around his neck, forcing his head down. The man would lift his feet and drive his heels against the shins of the one who applied the full nelson. But it worked. The

Vietnamese accepted the forced bowing as a face-saving compromise. The pounding of the man ended.

These efforts to save the Faker induced in him a massive and active hatred for his saviors. As the others continued to exercise him, he kicked them, elbowed them, spit in their faces, slapped and punched at them. Frustrated, the others, some of whom were often sick, all of whom were always weak and hungry, managed to restrain their anger. Now the man refused to eat. He would not be persuaded and after fourteen days he had wasted so that the others decided he had to be force-fed.

There were many unsuccessful experiments, but the man could not be made to open his clenched teeth. He kicked over plates of rice and sent the food lying all over the others and the cell. When he could get his hands on a plate, he would throw it at those who were trying to feed him. He was skin and bones, but when efforts were made to feed him he was always, for a few moments, full of a tremendous strength. Then the energy would ebb and they would feed him, but it still required teamwork, great effort, and patience. For the only way he could be made to open his teeth was to hold him down, hold his nose, and choke him. Then food would be stuffed into his mouth. As often as not, he would spit the food out and come up swinging and kicking.

Fidel departed sometime in August. He was not seen again. Now the Vietnamese concluded that the Faker was not faking. Frequently, a few bananas or cookies would be delivered for him. When the other prisoners would urge these extras upon him, he would sometimes accept them only to fire them back at those who had proffered them. The Vietnamese seemed increasingly frightened over the man's condition. Lump kept asking the other Americans, "What do you want us to do? What is needed?"

One of the group, Navy Lieut. Al Carpenter,* had a plan which Zoo SRO Larry Guarino approved. "Release him," Carpenter suggested. "See that he gets back to the United States, where he will receive proper treatment and care. Do that, and we'll see that the story never gets out about what we saw happen to him here."

The plan was rejected. It seemed clear the man's captors did not want him on view to the world. Lump kept badgering Bomar to write

*Captured on November 1, 1966, Navy Lt. Allen R. Carpenter is not to be confused with Air Force Capt. Joe Victor Carpenter, who was released on August 2, 1968, along with Air Force Maj. James Low and Air Force Maj. Fred Neale Thompson.

of the good treatment the man had received. Bomar kept producing such unsatisfactory statements as "He received two oranges after they stopped beating him with a fanbelt"; or "He was allowed a cookie after they stopped hitting him"; or "Since the beating stopped, he has been given a banana."

Dissension began to seethe within the Fidel group. Some of the men, sick and weary themselves, reached the end of patience with their deranged compatriot. Tired of trying to cope with him, they urged Bomar to demand that he be taken back to the hospital. Bomar agreed that hospital care was in order, but not in Hanoi. He thought it vital that the group retain physical possession of the man. Bomar felt certain that if the man were removed from the company of other Americans, he would never be seen again. Still, for the sake of some of the others, Bomar wanted him in another cell, preferably nearby, with some Americans who would look after him. Larry Spencer and Ed Hubbard volunteered for the job. Bomar, having divined that all good ideas must originate in his captors' heads, tried to emplant this one in Lump's cranium. It didn't take. The disaster continued.

months earlier, it told of the death of his mother. Silently, the SRO wept.

That Christmas many at the Zoo received packages from home, including the one whom Fidel had believed to be faking and had so brutally savaged. The Faker still lived in a cell in the Stable with several other Fidel prisoners, of whom Air Force Capt. Jack Bomar was senior. The others had continued to care for him, but it had been difficult. He remained deeply suspicious of them all, full of hatred and prone to violence. He would never leave his bunk, and in order to clean him the others had to pick him up, carry him to the bath area, and wash him, usually fighting and struggling throughout.

The Vietnamese left it to Bomar to deliver the Faker's Christmas package to him. Bomar felt certain he would violently reject the contents, mainly candy and chewing gum, would regard them as an enemy trick. But there were pictues of the man's handsome family, too, and Bomar thought and hoped that these might be the lifeline that would bring him back, save him. Bomar took the pictures out of the package, and assigned Larry Spencer to try to persuade the Faker to accept the remainder of the contents; Spencer had worked harder and done more for the man than anyone else, and while the Faker displayed no trust or affection for him, he seemed more likely to accept something from Spencer than from anyone else. But when Spencer offered the package, the Faker flung it away.

The pictures were handled with care. Using bamboo scraps and pieces of twine from blankets, Ed Hubbard fashioned handsome frames for them. Carefully, Spencer approached the Faker with them and showed them to him, explaining that the photographs were of his family, assuring him that his was indeed a beautiful family. The Faker stared vacantly at the pictures. There was not the slightest flicker of recognition or interest. Nothing. He looked away.

The pictures were hung on the wall behind the Faker's bunk. No one ever saw him look at them.

Another year was dying. In a jungle encampment in South Vietnam, Army Capt.-Doctor Floyd Kushner wondered how many more Americans would die with it. Some were in bad shape and getting worse.

One was Roberts, the Marine who already had been a prisoner for

you embarrass the Vietnamese people, you will be severely punished."

He was presented to Fidel, who impressed him. He was well dressed, in a sport shirt and slacks, and, despite his accent, had good command of English. Bomar assumed him to be a Latin American.

Fidel was stern with the prisoner. He spoke of the "grave crimes" the United States was perpetrating against "the peaceful Vietnamese people," who were "trying to unify their fatherland." He assured Bomar that he was a "criminal from the day you hit the ground," and not entitled to the protection of the Geneva Convention. Therefore, Bomar was to be "tried for your crimes by the Vietnamese people."

"I can help you with your defense," Fidel said, "but you will have to be very honest with me. Are you an honest man?"

Bomar confided that he was, to be sure, honest.

"Good," said Fidel, "because I want to give you a break."

After perhaps an hour of this, Bomar was returned to his cell. He was shaken. Like most of the POWs, he had heard many threats that the Americans were all to be tried, but it had always been said in a general, unconvincing way. But this had been specific—Fidel had left no doubt that Bomar was to be placed on trial. He was scared.

The next night, a Friday, he was again brought before Fidel. The Latin reminded him that he had claimed to be honest and said that now he was going to give him a chance to prove it. He produced a pad of paper and a pencil. He numbered the pages, from "1" to "20," handed the pad and pencil to Bomar, and said, "Write all you know about the EB-66 aircraft. They don't really need this, intelligence-wise. They know all about the airplane. This is just to prove you are honest so that I can trust you and help you in your trial."

Bomar was given the weekend to compose the essay. The EB-66 was an electronic intelligence collector, used in North Vietnam to locate SAM sites and communications centers for attack by other aircraft. Bomar had been navigator aboard one when it had been shot down. He was frightened. He certainly could not provide any military information. He spent the weekend wondering whether to write twenty pages of nonsense—or nothing. Fidel had impressed him as being smart and might not be fooled by nonsense; and he was tough—he might not put up with nonsense, or with nothing. He worried, and wondered what Ed Hubbard was going to do, or had done. Air Force Lt. Edward Lee Hubbard, another EB-66 navigator, had been downed on July 20, 1966, and Bomar assumed that Fidel,

Andres F. Garcia
Vice President
Cuban American Veterans Association (CAVA)
October 29, 1999
House Committee on International Relations

Chairman Gilman, members of the House International Relations Committee, ladies and gentlemen. It is a privilege to be asked to participate in your hearings.

Let me begin by thanking you and the members of your committee for your efforts to learn what happened to our POWs during the "Cuba Program", under which 20 Americans, members of the US Armed Forces, in Cu Loc (the Zoo), a POW camp in North Vietnam, were tortured by agents of Fidel Castro's government from mid-1967 to mid-1968, resulting in the tragic death of one of the POWs, Capt. Earl G. Cobeil.

My most sincere gratitude to Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen for her constant defense of the veterans' rights and for her tireless efforts in uncovering the truths of the cruelty of Fidel Castro, not only against his own people, but against humanity and more specifically against the American People whom he hates with a passion as demonstrated once and again by his actions throughout his life. This time, his involvement in atrocities committed against our servicemen, proves our point and cannot be left unpunished.

For the past forty years, Castro's Ministry of the Interior has utilized cruel methods of torture to break down those they consider enemies of the "Revolution". These same methods were used against 20 defenseless POWs in North Vietnam.

Who were those monsters that inflicted so much pain to this group of POWs? Today we can partially answer this question thanks to the information we have obtained from sources in Cuba and from former members of Castro's Armed Forces now residing in Miami.

The agent nicknamed "Fidel" was positively identified by Col. Ed Hubbard as ***Brigadier General Fernando Vecino Alegret*** in a press conference held at the Miami offices of Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen's. Col Hubbard's identification of this criminal was possible thanks to a picture of General Vecino Alegret in his youth provided by Roberto Luque Escalona, a Cuban writer now residing in Miami, who at one point in his life was a friend of the torturer.

A. F. Garcia's testimony – cont.
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Fernando Vicente Alegret was born in June 24, 1938 in the city of Holguin, Oriente province, Cuba. He is the first of four brothers. His father was a banker and his mother a teacher. During the Batista regime, the Vecino Alegret family had some privileges denied to others. When Fernando Vecino Perez' employer transferred him to the Camaguey province, Batista himself, approved the transfer of Isabel Alegret Ramirez to a school in Camaguey even though there was no opening, so the family could stay together.

In 1956, Vecino Alegret traveled to Hammond, Louisiana where he stayed with a Cuban-Canadian family. In September 1956 he registered in the University of Alabama in the School of Chemical Engineering. While in school he worked in a cafeteria and played football. Some people claim that he did not return to Cuba until after Castro took over power; however, in an interview for "The secrets of the Generals" a book written by Luis Francisco Baez Hernandez, a Cuban reporter, and published by Editorial Si-Mar S.A. in Havana, Cuba in 1996, Vecino Alegret claims that he moved to Miami in 1957 where he was arrested by the FBI for possession of an unregistered weapon. According to him, he entered Cuba in May 1958 to join Castro's Rebel Forces.

Fernando Vecino Alegret's first violation of US citizens' human rights took place in 1958 when he kidnapped two American engineers, who worked for Texaco in Santiago de Cuba, Richard Bennett and Kenneth Drews. In exchange for their safe return, Charles M. Cutbirth, an executive of Texaco provided the Rebel Forces with all the gasoline they needed. This action caused the State Department to issue a strong declaration against Castro's forces through the Department's spokesman Lincoln White.

When the Rebel Forces took control of the government, Fernando Vecino Alegret was placed in charge of the National Institute of Agricultural Reform in Oriente. In 1966, while in charge of the Union of Cuban Communist Youth, he traveled to France in an espionage mission. In 1966 he was given command of Castro's missile forces. From 1967 to 1975 he performed a number of missions for Castro's DGI (Department of General Intelligence), including a period as military attaché in North Vietnam. From August 1967 to July 1968 he headed the "Cuba Program".

A. F. Garcia's testimony – cont.
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As a reward for his actions, he was promoted in 1975 to vice minister of the Armed Forces. That same year he traveled to Angola to supervise Castro's war. In 1979 he moved to Costa Rica to provide assistance to the Sandinista Forces then fighting the Somosa regime. When the Sandinistas won the war, Fernando Vecino Alegret used his contacts with his Vietnamese friends to ship 100 captured American 105 mm howitzers from Vietnam to Nicaragua. The artillery pieces were shipped in a vessel operated under Lebanese registry by the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Brigadier General Fernando Vecino Alegret has been a member of the Communist Party Central Committee since 1975 and Minister of Higher Education since 1976.

The following alleged torturers have not been properly identified by any of the POWs; however, we hope to obtain more information in the future through our contacts.

Rafael Veiga. He studied in Tulane University, Louisiana, in 1958. When Castro took over, Veiga became the right hand man of Ramiro Valdes Menendez, founder of the Department of Intelligence of the Rebel Army (DIER) or the dreaded G2 (as it was commonly known) and Minister of the Interior since 1961. The members of the G2 where famous for the cruelties inflicted to their enemies. They boasted their success in extracting confessions from their victims even if they were innocent.

Pedro Fumero. Another member of the team of Ramiro Valdes Menendez.

Eduardo Morejon Estevez. Colonel of the DGIC (Department of General Intelligence and Counter Intelligence). He studied in the US in 1958. The Nuevo Herald, a newspaper owned by The Miami Herald, confirmed with the US Immigration Department that a Cuban national named Eduardo Morejon Estevez entered the US in 1958. He was a military attaché in North Vietnam in 1967-1968. Currently he is an executive of Artex SA, a government business in Havana.

Luis Perez Jaen. Captain of the MININT (Ministry of Interior). He was in the US in 1956-1957 buying weapons for the Rebel Forces in Cuba. He was a military attaché in North Vietnam in 1967-1968.

A. F. Garcia's testimony – cont.
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The following individuals are not accused of torturers but because of their official position during the years of the "Cuba Program" must have valuable information.

Brigadier General Jose Legro Sauquet. In 1964 was appointed Lead Engineer of TCAA (Anti Aircraft Missiles Technology) in the headquarters of DAAFAR (Rebel Armed Forces Department of Anti Aircraft). He was assigned to Vietnam in three different occasions, 1966, 1969 and finally in 1975, when he joined the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) in the capture of Saigon.

Raul Valdes Vivo. Cuban Ambassador in North Vietnam from 1969 to 1976. He visited the Zoo during the "Cuba Program". He also visited Viet Cong controlled areas in South Vietnam. Member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from 1975 to 1991 and 1997 to the present.

Marta Rojas. She visited the Zoo with Raul Valdes Vivo. She is the alleged voice heard on the camp radio.

Julio Garcia Olivera. Cuban Ambassador in North Vietnam 1967-1968. He is currently retired in Havana.

We received a letter from the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office dated 9/29/99 directed to our organization CAVA that reads in part; "*The actions of these interrogators constitute grave breaches of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of POW for which there are no statute of limitation...We stand ready to support any future investigation into this issue by appropriate federal intelligence or investigative agencies*".

We suggest that the CIA, FBI, Department of State, Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affair, create a task force to fully investigate the involvement of the Castro regime in the "Cuba Program". I am confident that the gathered evidence will warrant indictments to be handed down against Fidel Castro himself, the person fully responsible for any and all actions of his dictatorship, and the agents who tortured our POWs. If necessary, to avoid any interference from any officials or any agencies or departments claiming foreign policy interest, a Special Prosecutor should be appointed to handle this very sensitive case against our servicemen.

A. F. Garcia's testimony – cont.
Page 5

In my childhood in Cuba I read an article in Selecciones (Readers Digest Spanish version) that caused a strong impression on me. The article described the efforts of the American Forces in rescuing a downed American pilot in a Pacific Island during World War II. Due to heavy resistance from the Japanese Forces, heavy casualties were inflicted to the Americans. The Japanese commander was astonished to see how many lives the Americans were willing to sacrify to rescue a downed pilot, but the answer was clear to the Americans: The life of one American, especially, the life of a serviceman fighting for his country, was as valuable as the lives of all the Americans. The American soldier knows that he will never be abandoned.

I experienced this, many years later in Vietnam, when I signed a statement saying that I would never abandon in battle any wounded soldier or the remains of a dead soldier. Sadly, I had to follow this oath when in one occasion we carried the bodies of three of our brothers killed in action for three long days until our helicopters could pick them up. But this is what makes America great, and makes me proud to be a citizen of this great country. We must seek justice for the tortured POWs and the family of Capt. Earl G. Cobell, assassinated by the Castro's agents. We shouldn't let foreign policy or any other special interest prevent us from getting the truth.

My voice today, is not the voice of a single veteran, who proudly served with the 82nd Airborne Division in Vietnam in 1968 – 1969, while I was still a Cuban refugee, but I am speaking for those Cuban American men like me, who do not have a voice today, because they gave their lives fighting for freedom and justice with the US Armed Forces in Korea, Vietnam and Lebanon. I am proud to honor their memories by providing their names in an attachment to this testimony. What a difference between the sacrifice of these men and the monsters that tortured our POWs!

I am also speaking on behalf of another highly decorated Cuban-born marine, who served two tours in Vietnam and continued his fight for freedom, justice and democracy for the land where he was born until he was murdered by the same government who tortured our POWs. His name is Armando Alejandre, Jr. On February 24, 1996, Castro's Air Force shot down two US unarmed, civilian aircrafts, killing Armando Alejandre with two US-born youngsters of Cuban descent, Carlos Costa, 27 years old and Mario de la Pena 23 and a legal US resident Pablo Morales.

A. F. Garcia's testimony – cont.
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These aircrafts were engaged in a humanitarian mission looking for rafters adrift in the Florida Strait. In an interview with Fidel Castro in Time magazine dated March 11, 1996 and conducted by Reginald K. Brack, Jr. and Joelle Attinger, the dictator of Cuba, acknowledged giving the order to shoot down the civilian aircrafts. This heinous conduct should remind us that we are dealing with a criminal who somehow is the darling of the majority of the American Press and who has always gotten away with all his crimes, including the sinking of the tugboat "13 de marzo" 7 miles off Havana Bay on July 13, 1994, where forty one civilians who were escaping from Cuba, including twenty children drowned, victims of Castro's forces.

The Cuban American community has been categorized by many as fanatics who exaggerate the role of Castro as an enemy of the US; however, time has always proved us right. The first Cubans arriving in the US denounced Fidel Castro as a communist while the big press, led by the New York Times, called him a Robin Hood. Were the crazy Cubans wrong? The Cubans denounced the introduction of missiles in Cuba long before it was almost too late. Not believing those reports almost caused the beginning of World War III and the possible destruction of civilization. Later on, more crazy Cubans began to report the movement of Castro's troops to Africa. Nothing was made public to the American people until Castro's Army was in full force in Angola, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The Cuban Americans in Miami have been denouncing Fidel Castro's involvement in drug trafficking. They were proven right in November 5, 1982, a federal grand jury in Miami indicted four senior Cuban government officials on charges of conspiring to use Cuba as a safe haven while transporting drugs into the United States. The four officials were Fernando Ravelo Renado, former Cuban Ambassador to Colombia; Gonzalo Bassols Suarez, former Deputy Chief of Mission under Ravelo; Rene Rodriguez Cruz, a member of Cuba's intelligence service and President of Cuba's Institute of Friendship with Foreign Peoples (ICAP) and the Cuban government official responsible for organizing the Mariel boatlift of 1980; and Vice Admiral Aldo Santamaria Cuadrado, the Commander of the Cuban Navy.

In addition to the four Cubans, 10 other persons where charged. What was the result? Nothing happened. Fidel Castro continues to be involved in drug trafficking, but General Barry R. McCaffrey, the Drug Czar claims there is no conclusive evidence that the Castro regime is involved. To top it off there has been some suggestions to provide Castro with more modern boats and radars to help us in the War against drugs. How can we be so naïve?

A. F. Garcia's testimony – cont.
Page 7

The Cuban Americans are now talking about Castro's involvement in biological warfare. Should we dismiss this as another crazy conspiracy theory of the Cuban Americans? The sad part is that if we do, we may not be around to be sorry in the future. This is the most serious danger our country has ever confronted.

The point I am trying to make is that with the communication we now have with dissidents in the island and the number of former Castro's military residing in the US, it is possible for us to obtain much more information today that in past years. Our organization CAVA stands ready to work with any federal agency that asks for our support in getting more information on the POW issue. Even if we are ignored, we will not allow this issue to fade away. It is our compromise to inform the American people of Castro's crimes against our servicemen and we will mobilize the veterans at the national level if necessary. I am not only a member of CAVA, but a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and the Vietnam Veterans of America, and I will seek their support.

Many in Congress, the press, some mayors, governors and even the US Chamber of Commerce, believe we should be soft with Fidel Castro in order to change him. Change a person who has been the most furious enemy of the US for the last 40 years? I know the answer to that question, but I propose that those members of Congress, the press and the US Chamber of Commerce ask Fidel Castro, that as a gesture of good will, he allows the alleged torturers to come to the US to be questioned and face their victims. If they have nothing to hide Castro should cooperate. Is this fair enough? Meanwhile, I will use an old saying of my grandparents, "buy a rocking chair and sit down, because you are going to get tired of waiting."

Another unanswered question is the possibility that Castro's agents were actively torturing people in Vietnam beyond 1968. A member of CAVA, Leo Viota-Sesin, a well known lawyer in the Cuban American community, who is a Vietnam veteran who arrived in country in 1969, has given me a statement which I am attaching to this testimony, where he explains that while in a fire base near Cambodia, right before the invasion of Cambodia, the American officer in charge of the base asked Leo Viota-Sesin not to reveal his Cuban roots to the Montagnards, because Castro's agents were attached to a North Vietnamese brigade operating in the area, and those agents had tortured and killed many members of the Montagnards community.

A. F. Garcia's testimony – cont.
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We should also investigate the possibility that some POWs were transferred to Cuba. Again, we have in Miami and New Jersey, not only former members of Castro's Armed Forces, but also a great number of Cuban political prisoners that may have information on this issue. We should not discard this possibility because it sounds too far fetch. We have learned that Fidel Castro is capable of anything.

The last question is why the American people were not fully informed of Castro's atrocities against our POWs as soon as we found out in 1973? I do not like to embrace a conspiracy theory, but questions must be answered. Let me inform you of a very disturbing fact. Fernando Vecino Alegret has been a suspect for many years, and I believe our many federal agencies were aware of this fact; however, we had the opportunity to have Fernando's brother in the US and we blew the opportunity away.

A member of CAVA, our veteran organization, who has contacts in Cuba and speaks with the dissidents in the island every week by telephone, has known Fernando's brother for over three years and gave me this report. "Ricardo (Richard) Vecino Alegret, residing at Rabi #551, Apt. 6, between San Bernardino and Santa Irene, in Santo Suarez, Havana, left Cuba on a boat together with Juan Rafael Fernandez, General Coordinator of the Movimiento Democratico Cientifico (Scientific Democratic Movement) in the summer of 1997. They were picked up by an American Coast Guard vessel and taken to Guantanamo Naval Base. They contacted several friends in Miami trying to avoid been returned to Cuba. In spite of the fact that both Ricardo Vecino Alegret and Juan Rafael Fernandez were members of a bona fide dissident organization, and that Ricardo was a brother of General Fernando Vecino Alegret, Minister of Higher Education, mentioned as an alleged torturer in the "Cuba Program", they were returned to the hands of the Cuban government." Why was Ricardo Vecino Alegret returned to Cuba?

Furthermore, in 1979, Fernando Vecino Alegret visited the US and toured Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Knowing that he was an alleged torturer of our POWs, what actions did our intelligent agencies take? The FBI just took pictures of Vecino Alegret.

A. F. Garcia's testimony – cont.
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The fact is that nothing has changed since 1967. Fidel Castro continues to be the worst enemy the US ever had. He is a dagger pointing at the US under belly. Yes, he is capable of having ordered the torture of POWs in Vietnam, he is capable of killing innocent children, he is capable of shooting down civilian unarmed airplanes carrying US citizens, he is capable of using the drugs trade to further undermine the US and yes, he is capable, willing and able to perpetrate a biological attack against the US. He is capable and he will continue to plan further attacks against us with impunity, because he has always gotten away with anything he does.

The time to stand firm is now. We should investigate the crimes against the POWs; we should indict and prosecute those found guilty, including Fidel Castro, who has all the responsibility. Every time we have taken a weak stand, we have lost. Look at the Cuban Missile Crisis, if anyone believes that we won, he or she may still believe in the tooth fairy. Look at Vietnam, so many killed, so many wounded, so much suffering and the end result is another people, the Vietnamese people, suffering under communism. Look at the embarrassment in Iran, when they captured our embassy, violating all international laws.

When we have taken a stand from a position of strength we have been victorious. Look at Grenada, Panama, Iraq and Kosovo. We are the strongest power in the world, and the world respects a strong leader.

You as leaders of this great nation must assume a very important responsibility. We pray to God that your actions will lead to America doing the just, the moral, the right thing, without giving up to political and commercial interest.

I believe the following actions will help us achieve justice:

- Positively identify all the alleged torturers of the "Cuba Program."
- Investigate any other cases of violations of human rights by Castro's agents in Vietnam.
- Investigate the possibility that some POWs were secretly sent to Cuba.
- Get an explanation for the secrecy surrounding the "Cuba Program".
- Create a task force comprised of the intelligence agencies to conduct a thorough investigation.
- Seek the cooperation of the Cuban American community.
- Indict if guilty and carry out the sentence.

A. F. Garcia's testimony – cont.
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I do not want to close my testimony, without trying to take care of a doubt you may have in your mind, but may be too polite to ask. Is this another reckless statement by a Cuban? I am a Cuban American. My parents sent me to this country when I was a teenager and today I am already thinking about retirement. I paid my dues in Vietnam. I am no longer a refugee; I am a proud American citizen. My children were born here. I have a good decent job that allows me to help my community. I love this country. I love its freedom, its justice, and the opportunities to achieve a dream. I want nothing but the best for America. I am doubly privileged to be Cuban by birth and American by choice and very proud of both.

Thank you for this opportunity you have given me today. I will always be ready to do whatever is necessary not only as a representative of my veteran comrades but also as an individual. Thank you very much and God bless you all.

Attachment A

Cuban American Casualties

Korea

Manuel Perez

Osvaldo Llorens Guiteras

Vietnam

Diego Amador
Eduardo E. Casanas
Cesar E. Carballo
Louis A. Carricarte
Pedro Casals
Adolfo M. Estrada
Carlos A. Farto
Enrique G. Fernandez
Evelio A. Gomez

Dario D. Guerra
Noel B. Hernandez
Manuel E. Mesa, Jr.
Irenaldo Padron
Celso Perez
Elpidio J. Ravelo
Fernando A. Rivera, Jr.
Luis J. Simancas
Felix Sosa Camejo

Wilfredo P. Zamora

Lebanon

Juan Carlos Rodriguez
Guillermo San Pedro
Juan Miguel Comas

ATTACHMENT - B

LEONARDO VIOTA SESIN, ESQ.
ATTORNEY AT LAW

OCTOBER 21, 1999

ANDRES GARCIA
CUBAN AMERICAN VETERANS ASSOCIATION
MELLON UNITED NATIONAL BANK
HIALEAH, FLORIDA

DEAR MR. GARCIA:

AS PER YOUR REQUEST, I AM FORWARDING TO YOU A NARRATIVE OF EVENTS WHICH I WITNESSED DURING MY SERVICE FOR THE UNITED STATES ARMY AND WHILE STATIONED IN VIET-NAM 1969-1970.

THE TIME WAS SOMETIME PRIOR TO THE PERIOD OF THE CAMBODIA COUNTEROFFENSIVE. I WAS STATIONED IN LONG BINH AS PART OF THE 64TH Q.M. BATALLION AND HAD RESPONSIBILITY FOR PETROLEUM FIELD OPERATIONS IN III AND IV CORPS AREAS.

PRIOR TO THE CAMBODIA OPERATION I WAS SENT TO A FIRE BASE ON THE BORDER BETWEEN VIET-NAM AND CAMBODIA IN ORDER TO INSPECT THEIR FUEL SUPPLY, ESPECIALLY THE JET FUEL LINES AND FILTERS. THE FIRE BASE WAS MANNED BY AN AMERICAN OFFICER AND MEMBERS OF THE CAMBODIAN MOUNTANGARD TRIBE.

THE AMERICAN OFFICER AFTER MAKING INITIAL GREETINGS INQUIRED ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF MY LAST NAME. UPON BEING TOLD THAT I HAD BEEN BORN IN CUBA THE OFFICER IMMEDIATELY (AND RATHER WORRIED) SUGGESTED THAT THE FACT NOT BE REVEALED TO THE MEMBERS OF THE MONTANGARDS. I ASKED HIM WHY AND HE POINTED TO AN AREA OF JUNGLE APPROXIMATELY TWO MILES AWAY AND SAID THAT A BRIGADE OF NORT VIET-NAM REGULARS WAS OPERATING FROM THE AREA AND THAT THE OFFICERS DOING THE INTERROGATION OF CAPTURED MOUNTANGARDS WERE CUBANS AND THAT THEY WERE USING TORTURE AS PART OF THEIR INTERROGATION TECHNIQUES.

I AM, OF COURSE, WILLING TO GIVE THESE FACTS AND STATEMENTS UNDER OATH IF SO REQUIRED.

RESPECTFULLY,

LEONARDO VIOTA-SESIN,ESQ.

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E-mail: lviota@aol.com

Testimony of Captain Ray Vohden, USN, Retired
Survivor of the "Cuba Program"

before the
Committee on International Relations
U.S. House of Representatives

for a hearing on
"The Cuba Program– Torturing of American POWs by Cuban Agents"
November 1999
2172 Rayburn Building

My name is Ray Vohden. I retired from the Navy in 1986 as a Captain. I joined the Navy in 1953, was commissioned an Ensign, and won my wings in 1954. For the next ten years, I had various squadron and shipboard assignments. I was the senior man in the "Fidel Program" and the first man to be tortured. I was also the fourth longest held POW in North Vietnam.

In August 1964, I was assigned to Attack Squadron 216 as the Operations Officer flying in the A4C Skyhawk off the USS Hancock. Our carrier was in the South China Sea in early 1965 when the war against North Vietnam began to escalate. On my fifth mission, I was shot down bombing a bridge in North Vietnam. I broke both bones above the ankle when I landed. I was then taken to the camp known as the "Hanoi Hilton" where I was in complete solitary and was never moved off a wooden board for fourth months, except to go to the hospital for two hours one night to have a two-inch piece of bone cut from my leg because it had become infected.

For the next two and a half years, I was moved from camp to camp until being sent to "the Zoo" in November 1965. Throughout this two and a half year period, I survived like the other Pows. I lived in a small room, by myself or with one or two men. I was tortured, forced, and/ or punished before I wrote my biography and my confession.

In the early part of September 1967, I was looking forward to the end of the war and my homecoming when, one night, I was taken to an interrogation. To my astonishment, the man sitting across from me was a Caucasian. One of the Vietnamese camp officers sat next to him. We talked about the war for the next half-hour. He had an excellent command of English and appeared to be very knowledgeable about the U.S. and the war. Without question, his presence was almost earth shaking.

Several days later, I was moved to another room with Jack Bomar and another Air Force officer. They had both recently been shot down and had also talked to the Caucasian. One of us named him Fidel because we guessed he might be Cuban.

Individually, we met with him daily. The war was essentially the main topic. After several days, I concluded that I wanted no part of whatever he was up to. I decided to refuse cigarettes and be as unfriendly and as obnoxious as I could, in hopes that he would consider me unworthy for any purpose he might have for me. He told me he didn't like my unfriendly attitude and that I would be sorry.

I was taken to Quiz early in the morning. The Elf, one of the other Vietnamese officers was there. The Elf asked me what orders did I give when I was in the Pool Hall. I told him none. He asked four or five more times. I said none. He left and came back with 6 or 7 guards. They forced me to get on the floor. They put manacles on my wrists behind me and strapped my elbows together behind me. And for some undeterminable time, I suffered in the straps until he gave me a clue about what the order was. It was about throwing food away. I told him I gave the order.

Five minutes later, as they are taking the manacles and straps off, the door bursts open. In comes Fidel, ranting and raving like a madman, pointing his finger at me and telling me that I

better have a good attitude now and do everything he says. I told him yes. He said when I give you a cigarette and you don't smoke it, I will make you eat cigarettes until they come out of your ears. Then, he slapped me ten or fifteen times telling me I better do everything he says. I then had to write on a piece of notebook paper that I surrendered to the Vietnamese people and would do everything they want me to do. He told me other things to write and then told me to sign it. Now he says; "Prove you will do everything I tell you to, eat the whole piece of paper." It was hard to chew and did not break up very well, but I managed to swallow it after almost gagging and throwing up.

My shoulders and arms were still very painful but I was still able to use my crutches. I went back to the room I had come from, but Bomar and Duart were gone. They put me in leg irons and cuffs. For the next two weeks, I was beaten three of four times a day until I became demoralized and depressed and started to lose my appetite. I finally gave up eating anything. The last time t6he guard picked up the full dishes and left, Fidel came in five minutes later carrying the food. He was yelling and screaming at me that I was trying to cheat him again and that if I did not eat, they would hold me down and stuff the food down my throat. I tried to eat but jut could not. He screamed at me that he would kill me if I didn't eat. I had reached bottom. Tears streamed from my eyes. I didn't care if I lived or died. Fidel just stood there and watched. Without a word he left. Later that day, I moved to another room. There were no more leg irons cuffs or beatings.

A week later, the tactic shifted. Fidel had my meal brought to the interrogation room. He was playing some good Montavani music. He was friendlier now. Bomar, Duart and I eventually moved back together again. All had surrendered. The treatment improved. We got a few extra cigarettes each day. He now bou8rght us tea in the morning and he brought us a chess set. He brought me a cigar to smoke. We told him we didn't want these things. Fidel responded that if we didn't use what he gave us, we would be very sorry. As time passed, we had to carve wooden spoons, toy trucks and cars. One by one, more POWs joined us. All had been forced to surrender. We finally moved to a larger room when the number came to eight. We were able to go outside more often, dig a fishpond and made a fireplace.

At Quiz, Fidel talked about the war and about going home. He showed us pictures of fashion models in magazines. He talked about our wives and our families. We saw articles from Time and Newsweek magazine, especially anything that was anti war. He tried every argument in the book to convince us that the U.S. was wrong in its war of aggression. Every day, he reminded us not to become reactionary or we would suffer; that what he had given us before was just a sample of what would come.

On a weekly basis, he would give us the opportunity to give our true feeling on the war. I always told him the same. I told him that the U.S. was right in the war and that I supported our President.

This new nicer strategy did not last long. It was intermittantly combined with torture.

One morning in early March 1968, one of the camp officers came to the outside of our

room and disconnected the wires to our speaker. This gave rise to all kinds of speculation. Later that day, we heard from the guys in another building who had heard the radio program, that the first three U.S. prisoners had been released by the Vietnamese. The rest of the camp heard the radio that morning and the news of the release. I felt very relieved and proud of myself and the others who served with me in the Fidel program because, although I can't say for sure what the original purpose of Fidel's presence was, I believe the way the program was run, that its purpose was to find someone who could be of value to the North Vietnamese if released. It was evident that they wanted to release some prisoners because they did.

Some found it hard to believe that Fidel expected us to adopt the enemy views on the war and talk about good treatment after we were tortured and forced to surrender. But, after getting to know Fidel, I could see how this was his goal and how he believed that he could make this happen.

After Fidel failed in having any of his group released, his program continued without any real purpose or meaning.

Two weeks later, I moved to another room with Paul Schultz. I rarely saw Fidel again except on one or two occasions.

In the weeks before I moved, Fidel had been working with some other men. I suppose for the same reason that he had others join the program. But it appeared that one of the men, Earl Cobeil, was resisting Fidel to the maximum and, of course, Fidel was retaliating as well.

Several days after I moved, Earl Cobeil moved into the room next to mine with Don Waltman. Waltman said that Earl was all mixed up in his mind. He said that Earl accused him of being a Russian spy and would not eat or drink water because they were poisoned. Waltman could not get through to him. He said that it was obvious that Earl had had the straps because his wrists were very swollen. However, Waltman suspected the straps did not have much effect on him because he was so thin and probably his elbows went together without any pain.

The following day, late in the morning Fidel came to my room with Grimsey who was the turnkey for the "Pig Sty" building and he gave me the word to move. I gathered up my gear and left the room. Fidel took me aside after I left the room and told me that Cobeil was trying to Cheat him and was faking." Fidel ordered me to get him squared away or I would get twice as much as Cobeil got. Grimsey opened the door to Waltman and Cobeil's room. They were both standing. Waltman bowed but Cobeil just stood there with a vacant stare in his eyes. He was barefooted, had on his long clothes, which were filthy, covered with dirt and grimy dust. Fidel yelled at him a few times to get squared away but Cobeil just stood there motionless. I suggested to Fidel that the best thing to do at this time would be to get Cobeil a bath.

A bath was so important in those days because it was so hot and when we missed a bath for a day or more the sweat and dust combined to form a thin layer of sticky, grimy dust all over the body. One day without a bath was bad enough but three days without a bath was unbearable. I hoped that a bath might bring Cobeil to his senses. Fidel said okay, so Waltman, Cobeil and I

went to bather at the end of the building. As was customary, as soon as the door was closed behind us Waltman and I took off our clothes and started to wash. Right away, I noticed that Cobeil just stood there and stared. I could not believe my eyes! Was it possible that a guy did not want to take a bath as filthy as he was? There was not much water that morning so Waltman and I just put water on our wash rag and rinsed our body off. I told Cobeil to go ahead and wash and that it would make him feel a lot better. All of a sudden, he walked over to the spicket and started to drink from it. Again, I could not believe my eyes because everyone knew the water from the spicket was dirty and would make you sick. We told him to stop but he stopped only after he drank for 15 or 20 seconds. The, he just stood there and did not say a word. Grimsey came to the shower room a few minutes later and took us back to our room. Cobeil was the same as when we left. Fidel was standing at the door. All three of us lined up and Waltman and I bowed bu Cobeil just stood there again. I said, "Hey, Cobeil, bow." Nothing happened. Suddenly, Grimsey raised his leg and pushed his foot against Cobeil's body and he went tumbling over towards the back of the room. Fidel yelled loudly at Cobeil to stop cheating him or he would teach him a lesson he would never forget. The door closed. We had received our meal before the door closed so Waltman and I started to eat but Cobeil just sat on his bed, silently staring at the floor. I tried to talk to him and encourage him to eat but he would not. After eating, I talked to him some more and told him that if he was trying one of those tricks they sued in the Korean War, like the story we had all heard about the POW who started barking every time, the Koreans came, that kind of shit wasn't going to work with Fidel. After having seen Fidel for almost every day for 6 months, I knew that Fidel was going to get his way, far more than the N. Vietnamese. He was the most egotistical man I had ever met. He was very tall, dark, good looking, filled with confidence in himself and above all he was not going to let the Vietnamese see him fall in any endeavor since he was a self proclaimed expert. I was convinced that there was no limit that he would take a man to get what he wanted.

In addition, the difference between the Vietnamese and Fidel was that more or less once the Vietnamese got what they wanted they let up, at least for a while. Not so with Fidel. There wasn't a day that went by that there weren't threats and warnings to all of us. After seeing Cobeil in his present condition, I knew that he had had more then his share of punishment and that if he was really tough and faking and in sound mind, eventually Fidel would get to him. Although it appeared that Cobeil was off his rocker, we did not know for certain whether he was or was not faking. I showed him my crippled leg and told him who I was. I showed him pictures of my family, trying to convince him that I was an American prisoner and that I was trying to help him. After a few minutes of talking with him I felt as though I might have made a little progress. For the rest of the quiet hour Waltman and I tried everything imaginable to get Cobeil to come down to earth. But we were unsuccessful.

Shortly after the gong sounded ending the quiet hour, Grimsey came to the door and gave Waltman the signal to get ready for quiz. Minutes later he returned and Waltman left. At one point, the same time Fidel came to the door and told me to come outside. Fidel asked me if Cobeil was squared away? I told him that in my honest opinion Cobeil was not cheating, that he indeed was not at all rational and if he continued working Cobeil over he would never make it. I said that Cobeil was out of his mind and there was nothing I could do. I was hopeful that he would believe me about Cobeil. He listened carefully as I talked for several minutes and I

thought I might have convinced him that what I was saying was true but after several more minutes he accused me of trying to help Cobeil cheat him. I insisted that I was not and that there was nothing I could I could do to help Cobeil. The door was closed, locked and bolted. I think there had been some mutual respect between Fidel and me and hoped by what I said that he would let up on Cobeil. I started to talk to Cobeil again. I had been talking for less than a few minutes when all of a sudden Fidel jumped up in the window holding the bars and screamed out in his loud fierce voice, "I caught you", I caught you cheating me." I was completely surprised, because Cobeil had not said a word or changed a bit. Seconds later the door slammed open, Fidel said "Ah, I caught you both lying". He screamed at me "Get out, get out." As soon as I got outside of the room Fidel told me to go and stand at the end of the building. Since there were four guards standing outside the room where Cobeil was, he left the door to the room open and then left with Cedric who was a turnkey for one of the other buildings. A few minutes later Fidel returned with what looked like a fan belt of a car but cut so it was like a whip. As Fidel passed by he looked at me with a glaze in his eyes of an enraged mad man. He was breathing heavy and he told me if I made one sound or moved one inch of my body that I would get twice as much as what Cobeil was going to get. He appeared shaking as though nervous. Fidel said "He's trying to cheat me, he's trying to cheat me, I'll show you, I'll show him, I'll make him so happy to surrender and bow when I finish with him, he'll come crying to me on his knees begging me to let him surrender." By now there were about seven or eight guards standing in front of the door of Cobeil's room. Fidel went in with Grimsey and Cedric at his side. I could hear the thud of the belt falling on Cobeil's body again and again as Fidel screamed "you son of a beech, you fooker, you are cheating me", I will show you, I will show you". I guess he was hit around twenty or thirty times. I could just imagine Fidel almost twice the size of Cobile, twice as healthy and strong and frail Cobeil from whom I heard not a sound. I almost threw up each time I heard the fan belt hit Earl's body.

It was hard to listen as I did to Fidel beating Cobeil, a frail, diminutive little man, his wrists swollen three times the normal size, hair disarranged, clothes filthy rotten dirty, a vacant stare in his eyes, already pushed by torture beyond the limit from which he might have a chance to regain his sanity. It had been far easier for me to endure the straps then to have to go through this.

The guards all stood around talking loudly, laughing and yelling in Vietnamese. When I saw Fidel with the fan belt I was surprised because up to that time I had never heard of anyone getting hit like that. Slaps, punches, straps, manacles, ropes, –yes. But Fidel was going to show the Vietnamese a new trick.

I was scared to death while all this was going on because as angry as Fidel had been with me when I surrendered I had never seen the blood curdling look in his eyes or the emotion that surrounded him at this time. As I stood there on my crutches, my heart and mind overflowed with emotion. It was the most sickening feeling to hear what was going on and know there was not anything I could do about it. I said to myself, "give up Earl, do what the bastard wants. I thought for a short time that I should go to Earl's room and try to help him but realized that if I did he would have gotten five times what he was getting now and I would have gotten ten times as much for interfering.

Fidel was in the room for about five minutes. Still yelling and shouting at Cobeil. A guard approached me with a big happy smile on his face. I knew why he was happy. The little bastards were always ready to see and enjoy an American get worked over.

That was the last day I saw Cobeil.

It may have been out of frustration that Fidel treated Cobeil as he did. In retrospect, I believe the Vietnamese made a big mistake with Fidel because Cobeil's death is the only one that I know of while in captivity that was totally inexcusable resulting from brutality and blatant disregard of human life. There were others who died in captivity for various reasons but there was always some excuse because I believe their basic policy was not to torture to death. Men were tortured to death by mistake. They tortured to obtain military information or a political statement, they punished us for breaking their rules, some more than others, but rarely, if ever, tortured indefinitely just for the sake of torture. Eventually they always let up on a guy regardless how bad they might have disliked him. However, Fidel unmercifully beat a mentally defenseless, sick man to death and he, as well as the North Vietnamese Communists, must bear full responsibility for that act.

We will never know for certain why Fidel came to North Vietnam but one thing I can say with some degree of certainty is that as a result of the Code of Conduct and basic guidance provided by Ltcol. Risner and Cdr. Denton that those who had been tortured before, took their turn again and those who had done dumb things before came to realize they were dumb things and now had become part of the prisoner system.

There have been considerable efforts to locate Fidel in Cuba but without success. I have often wondered what we would do if we found him. Try him as a war criminal? No mention was ever made to try the North Vietnamese leaders as criminals. Thus, I question whether trying to locate Fidel would be a wasted effort. Maybe this hearing and the interest shown by Congressman Gilman and Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen to investigate will mean that some justice will be served.

Testimony of Michael D. Benge before the House International Relations Committee Chaired by the Honorable Benjamin A. Gilman, November 4, 1999.

My name is Michael D. Benge. While serving as a civilian Economic Development Officer in the Central Highlands of South Viet Nam, I was captured by the North Vietnamese during the Tet Offensive on January 28, 1968. I was held in numerous camps in South Viet Nam, Cambodia, Laos and North Viet Nam. I was a POW for over five years, and spent 27 months in solitary confinement, one year in a "black box," and one year in a cage in Cambodia. I served for almost 11 years in Viet Nam. I was released during Operation Homecoming in 1973. I am a Board Member of the National Alliance of Families for the Return of America's Missing Servicemen. And, I am a POW/MIA activist; that is, I am one who is actively seeking the truth regarding the fate of our Prisoners of War and Missing in Action.

I was not tortured by the Cubans, nor was I part of the "Cuban Program." There were 19 American POWs that I know of who were tortured by the Cubans in Hanoi during the Vietnam War. These brave men include Colonel Jack Bomar and Captain Ray Vohden, who will testify, and also Commander Al Carpenter, who is with us today. They named their torturers "Fidel," "Chico" and "Pancho." The torture took place in a POW camp called the Zoo, and the Vietnamese camp commander was a man they called the "Lump." He was called that because of the presence of a rather large fatty tumor in the middle of his forehead.

No, I was not tortured by Cubans in Vietnam, but I was interrogated by the "Lump," and a person who appeared to be a Latino and who spoke a few words of Spanish to the "Lump" during my interrogation in the early part of 1970. Upon my return to the U.S., I was shown a picture taken in Cuba of the "Lump," who was with an American anti-war group. Yes, it was the same person who had interrogated me in 1970. I was told by a Congressional Investigator that he was the man who was in charge of funneling Soviet KGB money to American anti-war groups and activists, such as Jane Fonda. After researching my paper, this made more sense, for who would be better suited to liaison with the Cubans. This was my first piece of the puzzle.

I decided to research the "Cuban Program" after repeated claims by the Administration, Senators John McCain and John Kerry, Ambassador Pete Peterson, and members of the Department of Defense (DOD) that the Vietnamese Government was "cooperating fully" in resolving the POW/MIA issue. This is far from the truth.

If the Vietnamese communists were fully cooperating as purported, they would have told us the true fate of the 173 U.S. servicemen who were last known to be alive and in the hands of the North Vietnamese communists. They would have helped us

resolve the fate of over 600 American servicemen who were lost in Laos, of which over 80% were lost in areas under the total control of the North Vietnamese. If the Vietnamese were fully cooperating, we would not be here today, for they would have revealed the names of the Cubans "Fidel," "Chico" and "Pancho," who were responsible for the torture of 19 American POWs; beating one so severly that it resulted in his death.

Upon their return to the U.S., the POWs in the "Cuban Program" were told by our government not to tell of their torture by the Cubans, but they resisted, as they had in the "Cuban Program, and some broke the silence. Regardless, the "Cuban Program" was swept under the rug by the U.S. Government.

Thus, I chose to research the "Cuba Program"--one segment of the POW/MIA issue--to prove my point that the Vietnamese communists were not fully cooperating as purported. I first produced a draft paper in 1996 for presentation at the annual meeting of the National Alliance of Families.

Commander Chip Beck, who at that time was with the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), became interested in my research, and tried to find out what DPMO knew. He was basically told by DPMO to back off. Congressman Bob Dornan also became interested. He held hearings, and requested that DPMO provide them with their analysis of the Cuban Program. A compilation was presented, and Mr. Robert Destatte from DPMO testified as to his and DPMO's analysis. Commander Beck also testified; after which, he was told by DPMO that his services were no longer needed.

With the release of DPMO's compilation and analysis, and the declassification of additional documents related to Cuba's involvement in Vietnam, I reassessed this information. In the DPMO compilation, there were memoranda stating that the CIA had identified Cuban military attaches Eduardo Morjon Esteves and Luis Perez Jaen with backgrounds that seemed to correspond with information on "Fidel" and "Chico" provided by returned POWs. Reportedly, Esteves served under diplomatic cover as a brigadier general at the United Naions in New York during 1977-78. Documents indicate that the FBI and DIA were "tasked" to ID these people; however, neither the CIA, the DIA, nor the FBI could produce a decent picture for identification by the returned POWs. It makes one wonder as to their level of effort.

Nonetheless, just from my reading the documents in the DPMO compilation, I found the profile of a man that that seemed to match almost perfectly the POWs' description of the Cuban called "Chico." However, this profile also partially fit the POWs' characterization of "Fidel." The profile was that of Major Fernando Vecino Alegret.

On August 22, 1999, the Miami Herald published an article on the "Cuban Program" based partially on my report. However, the reporter got it wrong and said that I believed Raul Valdes Vivo, the DGI agent attached to COSVN (ref. my submitted report), might be "Fidel." Independent of my report, a Cuban exile in the Miami area identified Fernando Vecino Alegret as "Fidel," based on information emanating from contacts within the exile community and Cuba. He also produced a picture of Alegret that was subsequentially identified by Col. Hubbard, who said he was 99% sure he was "Fidel." Alegret is now Cuba's Minister of Education, and Fidel Castro has issued a denial that Alegret was ever in Vietnam. However, DIA documentation in DPMO's compilation proves otherwise.

In Mr. Destatte's testimony, he claims he "was never responsible for any investigations or analysis related to the "Cuban Program." "Responsible" is the key word here that Mr. Destatte parses.

The Administration and the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) has mastered the art of obfuscation. I grew up on a farm in the West, and I used to try to catch greased pigs at the county fair, and I can assure you that trying to pin down DPMO to truthful facts is sometims much more difficult than trying to catch a greased pig.

Mr. Chuck Towbridge of DPMO is also implicated as participating in the investigation and analysis; however, it has never been revealed who was in fact in charge. One would hope that someone at DPMO is in charge.

Mr. Destatte testified to DPMO's conclusions and that the "Cuban Program" was nothing more than a program "to provide instruction in basic English to PAVN [North Vietnamese Army] personnel working with American prisoners."

I have taught English to Vietnamese, and have been tortured by the Vietnamese, and I can tell the difference between the two. One might conclude from Mr. Destatte's testimony that neither he nor Mr. Towbridge know the difference. I can also read English and understand what I read. One might also conclude that they may have a problem here too. Perhaps they should have taken basic English instruction from the Cubans.

Mr. Destatte also had the audäcity to testify that the Vietnamese high-command was unaware that the Cubans were torturing American POWs, and it was stopped once they found out. However, it is crystal clear from the POW debriefings, as well as the Air Force Intelligence Analysis, that the "Cuban Program" was sanctioned by the Vietnamese. This then leads one to ask, "How did Mr. Destatte reach his conclusion?"

Mr. Destatte reached his conclusion by asking North Vietnamese communist Colonel Pham Teo, who told Destatte he was in South Viet Nam in 1967-68 and knew nothing of the "Cuban Program." However, he had heard rumors that it was an English language instruction program that had "gone awry." Mr. Destatte testified that the Vietnamese explanation "is...fully consistent with what we know about the conduct of the Cubans in question."

Evidently, Destatte chose to believe a Vietnamese communist colonel over American POWs who had been brutally tortured in the "Cuban Program" and had clearly stated in their debriefings that the Vietnamese were well aware of and participated in their torture. Destatte choses to believe a member of a draconian regime, which had systematically murdered 70-80,000 political prisoners after they took over power in Vietnam in 1975, and who had broken every agreement ever made with the U.S. and South Vietnamese governments.

What bewilders me, as it should you, is that Destatte's superiors at DPMO had the audacity to let him testify before Congress to this foolishness. This exemplifies the quality of DPMO's investigation and analysis of the "Cuban Program."

I am neither a trained investigator nor an analyst, but I do know how to research. And I have concluded that at best, DPMO's investigation and analysis of the "Cuban Program" was not up to professional standards, and DPMO's conclusions are shameful! However, they did a great job of obfuscating the issue.

Since the "Cuban Program" was sanctioned by the Vietnamese, what then was the diving force behind it?" According to POW debriefings, supported by CIA and other reports, the "Cuba Program" was part of a Hanoi medical university's "psychological study." It was conducted to obtain full compliance from the American POWs, and to force them to make propaganda statements against the American government and the war in Vietnam. The real reason for the termination of the "Cuban Program" was so "Fidel," "Chico" and "Pancho" could return to Cuba as planned in time to prepare a presentation for the October 18-21, 1968, communist internationale Second Symposium Against Yankee Gonocide In Vietnam. This symposium in Cuba was a continuum of the Bertrand Russel War Crimes Tribunal kangaroo court and dog-and-pony show held in Denmark the previous year.

My paper is based partially on what DPMO gave to Congressman Dornan's Committee, as well as on documents obtained from the DIA and the CIA through the Freedom of Information Act, and it is throughly referenced. I would like to submit a copy of it and the referenced material to the Committee at this time for the record.

However, I have just scratched the surface, but I found enough documents to indicate that there should be a plethora of others related to the Cuban involvement in Vietnam if they are ever declassified as two U.S. Presidents have decreed. I also recommend that this matter be thoroughly investigated by professional investigators, not DPMO analysts.

Besides evidence contrary to DPMO's stated position on the "Cuban Program," the documents I examined reveal:

-- the possibility that a number of American POWs from the Vietnam War had been held in Los Maristas, a secret Cuban prison run by Castro's G-2 intelligence service. The Cuban who claims to have seen them later escaped and made it to the United States, and was reportedly debriefed by the FBI;

-- a Cuban Official had offered the State Department to ransom some American POWs from Vietnam, but there was no follow up;

-- that Cubans, along with Russians, guarded a number of American POWs in Laos;

-- the Cubans photographed a number of American POWs in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia;-- that besides the "Cuban Program," the Cubans were very heavily involved in Vietnam. They had several thousand "engineers" in Vietnam constructing, repairing and guarding the Ho Chi Minh Trail where a large number of Americans disappeared;

-- the possibility that American POWs were "treated" in Cuban hospitals in Hanoi;

-- the Cubans had a permenant DGI agent assigned to the COSVN headquarters in Cambodia, the North Vietnamese command center directing the war in South Vietnam. This is a fact not found in the history books on the Vietnam War. He was assigned there on the insistance of Rauol Castro, the head of Cuba's military and the brother of the real Fidel. This fact belies Mr. Destatte's testimony that "the Soviet and Cuban governments did not successfully dictate policies or actions to the North Vietnamese government;"

-- two unrelated documents telling of American POWs being taken from Vietnam to Cuba;

-- the Cubans were also actively engaged in subversive activities, infiltrating a number of communist youth into the U.S., and were funneling KGB money through Vietnamese communist agents to antiwar groups and individuals in the U.S.;

-- as recent as 1996, the Vietnamese trained Cuban Special Forces to undertake limited attacks in the USA.

Instead of hiring analyists at DPMO, DOD should hire some good professional investigators, such as former FBI or police investigators, and some people who know how to do systematic research. However, everytime DPMO gets good ones, it seems to find a way to get rid of them.

My paper raises more questions than it answers, but only history will prove me right or wrong; however, I think I am on the right track. Only through full disclosure by the U.S. government agencies, which were gathering information on the depth of Cuban involvement in the Vietnam war and with American POWs, will we know the truth.

As you can see from my document, the Cubans were heavily involved in the Vietnam War. They were in charge of building and maintaining a good portion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Recently, I was invited as a representative of the National Alliance of Families to a briefing at DPMO by its head, Bob Jones. Among things he discussed was his proposal for DPMO to sponsor a meeting between the U.S., Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos to discuss American Servicemen lost along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. I suggested to Mr. Jones that he should also invite Cuba to the conference, for they were heavily involved. He told me that I was rediculous, for the Cubans weren't involved in Vietnam. I recommended to him that he read both the material presented to Congress on the Cuban Program and Raul Valdes Vivo's book.

I was brought up with old fashoned values. My mother taught me at a young age that no matter how hard you search for the truth, you won't find it unless you want to.

We are not seeking revenge. We will leave that issue to the courts. We are also not seeking to get someone fired, we leave that up to you to judge. We are only seeking an honest accounting for the POW/MIAs. We, like every American should, only seek honest answers from our government and its representatives, and competent investigations as to the fate of the POW/MIAs so that their families might find closure to their long suffering grief.

Ignorance? Arrogance? Disinterest? Lack of caring? Incompetence? Obfuscation? I rest my case.

Respectfully Submitted

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For efforts in rescuing several Americans prior to capture, he received the State Department's highest award for heroism and a second one for valor. He also received three of South Viet Nam's highest medals for civilians.

Cuban War Crimes Against American POWs During the Vietnam War*

Cuban officials, under diplomatic cover in Hanoi during the Vietnam War, brutally tortured and killed American POWs whom they beat senseless in a research program "sanctioned by the North Vietnamese."(1) This was dubbed the "Cuba Program" by the Department of Defense (DOD) and the CIA, and it involved 19 American POWs (some reposts state 20). Recent declassified secret CIA and DOD intelligence documents, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, reveal the extent of Cuba's involvement with American POWs captured in Vietnam. A Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report states that **"The objective of the interrogators was to obtain the total submission of the prisoners..."(2)**

According to former POW Air Force Colonel Donald "Digger" Odell, "two POWs left behind in the camp were 'broken' but alive when he and other prisoners were released [1973 Operation Homecoming]. ... They were too severely tortured by Cuban interrogators" to be released. The Vietnamese didn't want the world to see what they had done to them."(3)

POWs released during "Operation Homecoming" in 1973 "were told not to talk about third-country interrogations. .... This thing is very sensitive with all kinds of diplomatic ramifications."(4) Hence, the torture and murder of American POWs by the Cubans was swept under the rug by the U.S. Government.

The "Cuban Program"

The "Cuban Program" was initiated around August 1967 at the Cu Loc POW camp known as "The Zoo", a former French movie studio on the southwestern edge of Hanoi. The American POWs gave their Cuban torturers the names "Fidel," "Chico," "Pancho" and "Garcia." The Vietnamese camp commander was given the name "The Lump" because of a fatty tumor growth in the middle of his forehead.

Intelligence and debriefing reports reveal that testing "torture methods were of primary interest" of the "Cuban Program." The Cuban leader of the "Cuban Program" ["Fidel"] was described in debriefing reports as "a professional interrogator," and a second team member was described as looking like a Czech ["Chico"]. "The Cubans has (sic) the authority to order NVNS [North Vietnamese] to torture American PWs [POWs]." The Vietnamese "catered" to the Cubans.(5)

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*Research conducted for the National Alliance of Families for the Return of America's Missing Servicemen by Board Member and former Vietnam POW Mike Benge.

According to a 20 January 1976 deposition, Marge Van Beck of DIA/DI, Resources and Installation Division, MIA/PW Branch, states that she was told by the "Air Force that the CIA had identified FIDEL."(6) Since the CIA and the FBI has not released all documentation relevant to the "Cuban Program", there were no copies of any photographs accompanying the Defense Department's September 11, 1996, report to Congress, Cuban Program Information.(5)

Several other documents corroborate that the CIA analysts identified two Cuban military attaches, Eduardo Morjon Esteves and Luis Perez Jaen, who had backgrounds that seemed to correspond with information on "Fidel" and "Chico" supplied by returning POWs.(7) Reportedly, in 1977-78, Esteves served under diplomatic cover as a brigadier general at the United Nations in New York and no attempt was made to either arrest or expel him.(8)

However, unless the Cubans were overconfident, it is highly unlikely that those who participated in the "Cuban Program" would have used their actual names when they went to Vietnam, since it is standard practice in undercover operations to use new identities. According to an expert on Cuba, "Fidel's" profile fits that of Cuban Dr. Miguel Angel Bustamente-O'Leary, President of the Cuban Medical Association. [DPMO's compilation lists a Professor Jose Bustamante, who was the president of the Pan-American Medical Confederation.] Dr. Miguel Bustamente is said to be an expert at extracting confessions through torture and he was compared to Nazi Dr. Joseph Mengale.(9)

"Chico's" profile fits that of Major Fernando VECINO Alegret, described in two intelligence reports as being "un-Cuban in appearance makes [sic] one wonder if he was a Cuban, or a block officer (possible Czech) in Cuban uniform." "He has studied in the USSR," and "...his Spanish...does not sound like Cuban Spanish." He was active in the Rebel Youth Association (AJR) and Union of Young Communists (UYC).(5b) His background would give him a natural tie-in to the international communist youth training center and the Vietnamese interrogation center in Cuba. It would also explain the observation of and participation in the "Cuban Program" by young Vietnamese officer trainees (see below).

According to POW debriefing reports, "The Lump" told a group of POWs that the 'Cuban Program'...was a Hanoi University Psychological Study."(5c) [Also see section on Vietnamese and Soviet Bloc Research on American POWs]

The torture and murder of American POWs in Vietnam by Cubans ets an unconscionable precedent and is in direct violation of the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War that the North Vietnamese communists signed.

The Beatings

"Fidel" called one of the American POWs the "Faker". However, he wasn't faking it. He was one of the three American POWs who had already been beaten senseless by "Fidel" and his cohorts.

> The sight of the prisoner stunned Bomar, he stood transfixed, trying to make himself believe that human beings could so batter another human being. The man could barely walk; he shuffled slowly, painfully. His clothes were torn to shreds. He was bleeding everywhere, terribly swollen, and a dirty, yellowish black and purple from head to toe. The man's head was down; he made no attempt to look at anyone. He had been through much more than the day's beatings. His body was ripped and torn everywhere; "hell- cuffs" appeared almost to have severed the wrists, strap marks still wound around the arms all the way to the shoulders, slivers of bamboo were embedded in the bloodied shins and there were what appeared to be tread marks from the hose across the chest, back and legs. Fidel smashed a fist into the man's face, driving him against the wall. Then he was brought to the center of the room and made to get down onto his knees. Screaming in rage, Fidel took a length of rubber hose from a guard and lashed it as hard as he could into the man's face. The prisoner did not react; he did not cry out or even blink an eye. Again and again, a dozen times, smashed the man's face with the hose. He was never released.(10)
>
> Air Force ace Major James Kasler was also tortured by "Fidel" for days on end during June 1968. "Fidel" beat Kasler across the buttocks with a large truck fan belt until "he tore my rear end to shreds." For one three-day period, Kasler was beaten with the fan belt every hour from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. and kept awake at night. "My mouth was so bruised that I could not open my teeth for five days." After one beating, Kasler's buttocks, lower back, and legs hung in shreds. The skin had been entirely whipped away and the area was a bluish, purplish, greenish mass of bloody raw meat.(11)

DPMO's Evaluation

The "Cuban Program" was evaluated by two of the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office's (DPMO) chief analysts Robert Destatte and Chuck Towbridge. In an email to Commander Chip Beck, an intelligence officer who at the time was working at DPMO, Destatte said he had concluded that the "Cuban Program" was nothing more than a program "to provide instruction in basic English to PAVN [North Vietnamese Army] personnel working with American prisoners."(12) According to Destatte, it was an English language program that had gone awry.

Destatte also has the audacity to claim that the Vietnamese were unaware of the "Cuban Program," and it was stopped once the Vietnamese found out that "Fidel" and the others were torturing the American POWs. However, the evidence that Destatte studied in compiling the report to Congress belies his assertion. It is very clear from the POWs' debriefing reports that the camp commander, "The Lump", guards and various other Vietnamese cadre were present during torture sessions.

Destatte also professes, "The Vietnamese explanation is plausible and fully consistent with what we know about the conduct of the Cubans in question..."(12) And how had Destatte reached his conclusion? Destatte asked the North Vietnamese communists, and this is what they told him! These are the very same people who broke every agreement they made with the United States, and who systematically murdered over 80,000 political prisoners after the communist takeover of South Viet Nam in 1975. **A military historian once told Commander Beck not to underestimate "dumb," and Beck said Destatte would have to be brain-dead, however, to be that dumb.**(13)

It is evident that DOD's analysis of the "Cuban Program" is incomplete for it did not examine the possible link to a Hanoi University research study, nor was there any investigation of Cuba's role in maintaining the Ho Chi Minh Trail where numerous American servicemen were captured. In early 1999, DPMO's chief, Bob Jones, told members of the organizations representing the families of POW/MIAs that he had proposed a meeting among Vietnam, Laos and Cambodian officials to discuss the fate of American POW/MIAs. The author, representing the National Alliance of Families, suggested that Cuba should also be invited to participate, since they were responsible for the "Cuban Program" as well as for maintaining a good share of the Ho Chi Minh Trail where many servicemen became MIA. Jones retorted that my suggestion was ridiculous for there was no evidence that the Cubans were ever involved. ["See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil," author.]

Other Cuban Involvement With POWs

Documents reveal that Cubans not only tortured and killed a number of American POWs in Vietnam, but may have also taken several POWs to Cuba in the mid-1960s. The POWs, mostly pilots, were reportedly imprisoned in Las Maristas, a secret Cuban prison run by Castro's G-2 intelligence service. The source of this information reportedly was debriefed by the FBI; however, this debriefing report was not in DPMO's report to Congress, and no evidence has surfaced that there was any other follow up.(14)

According to a February 1971 State Department cable, a former aide to Fidel Castro offered "...to ransom POWs in NVN [North Viet Nam] through the Castro Government." The cable

concluded, "Propose doing nothing further unless advised."(15) Evidently no advice was forthcoming, and there is no evidence of any other agency investigating this matter.

One intelligence source reportedly interviewed "Fidel", "Chico" and "Pancho" after they returned from Hanoi to Cuba and said they claimed that their real job was to act as gate-keepers to select American POWs who could aid international communism.(16)

According to a DIA "asset", Hanoi made "a political investment in all cases where prisoners [could] be ideologically turned around in order to someday serve its designs in behalf of international communism."(17) This is corroborated by several other intelligence reports. One, a CIA briefing memo, reveals that "As of September 1967 [redacted] a great deal of proselytizing of American pilots was being carried out in an effort to try to convince them to go to other communist countries as advisors. [redacted] This was disclosed during an official Party briefing [redacted]. The North Vietnamese claimed the communist countries needed the advice of American pilots to counter any attack which the U.S. might make against the communist countries."(18) This was the same time period that the "Cuban Program" was in full operation.

Those Americans targeted for selection by the communists as "advisors" for the communist countries would have been the highly-skilled pilots and electronic warfare back-seaters, skills highly prized by Soviet Bloc countries. The reported American POWs ("pilots") reported to have been held in Las Maristas prison in Cuba could have been some of these highly skilled people, who would have been prized assets for communist Cuba.

DPMO's analyst Bob Destatte wrongly concluded that the "Cuban Program" was terminated by the Vietnamese in August 1968 because of "Fidel's" excesses in torturing the American POWs. This is far from the truth, for the Vietnamese communists routinely continued to torture American POWs in other camps long after the "program" was terminated.

Besides being part of a medical study linked to the University in Hanoi, Cuba was carrying out an aggressive propaganda campaign and other subversive activities against the U.S. The real reason that "Fidel" and "Chico" left at that time was to return to Cuban to prepare for a presentation at a communist internationale Second Symposium Against Yankee Genocide in Vietnam held in Cuba, October 18-21, 1968.(19) There, films and tapes were shown of the research on American POWs in the "Cuban Program" that served to boost the morale of the communists that the war in Vietnam was being won.(1) [Similar to the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal "kangaroo court" and "dog and pony show" held in Denmark in July 1967.(20)]

"Fidel", "Chico" and "Pancho" weren't the only Cubans who were involved with American POWs. As part of their propaganda program, Dr. Fernando Barral, a Spanish-born psychologist, interviewed Lt. Cmdr. John Sidney McCain Jr. (now a U.S. Senator) for an article published in Cuba's house-organ Granma on January 24, 1970.(21) Barral was a card-carrying communist internationale residing in Cuba and traveling on a Cuban passport.

Cubans on the Ho Chi Minh Trail

The Cubans were heavily involved in the Vietnam war. Cuba had a very large contingent of combat engineers, the Giron Brigade, that was responsible for maintaining a large section of the "Ho Chi Minh Trail;" the supply line running from North Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia to South Vietnam. The contingent was so large that Cuba had to establish a consulate in the jungle.(22)

A large number of American personnel serving in both Vietnam and Laos were either captured or killed along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and in all likelihood, many by the Cubans. One National Security Agency SigNet report states that 18 American POWs "are being detained at the Phom Thong Camp..." in Laos, and "...are being closely guarded by Soviet and Cuban personnel with Vietnamese soldiers outside the camp."(23)

Cubans and Other POWs

According to CIA documents Cuban communist party committee members, Cuban "journalists" Raul Valdes Vivo and Marta Rojas Rodriguez, "visited liberated areas of South Vietnam where they interviewed [interrogated] U.S. prisoners of war being held by the Viet Cong."(24) [Many of the American POWs held in the South Viet Nam, were in fact under the command-control of the North Vietnamese's Enemy Proselytizing Bureau, but temporarily farmed-out to Viet Cong.] Rojas told of her "interviewing" American POWS in South Viet Nam at the Bertram Russel mock war crimes tribunal in Denmark in 1967.(20) Photographs of some of the POWs, and related articles, appeared in Cuban and various other communist media. American POWs Charles Crafts, Smith, McClure, Schumann and Cook were among those interviewed and photographed by Rojas and Vivo. **This leads one to ask, "Why hasn't DOD pursued questioning these two, and other Cubans, about the fate of American POWs?"**

One POW camp holding a large number of Americans was located about 100 km from the Chinese border between Monkai and Laokai, (an area where Cuban engineers were constructing military installations after 1975). According to an intelligence source, "one day the camp just disappeared, guards and all".(25) [also see End Notes]

The disappearance of American POWs near the Cuban facilities at Monkai and Laokai wasn't an isolated incident. American POWs also disappeared in the vicinity of two other Cuban installations. One American POW camp, located at "Work Site 5" (Cong Truong 5) just north of the DMZ, was adjacent to a Cuban field hospital that Fidel Castro visited in 1972. None of the POWs held in that camp were ever released, including black American aviator Lt. Clemmie McKinney. McKinney was shot down in April 1972, approximately the same time as Castro's visit. McKinney's remains were returned on August 14, 1985. The Vietnamese claim that McKinney died in November 1972; however, "A CILHI (U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii) forensic anthropologist states his opinion as to time of death as not earlier than 1975 and probably several years later."(26) Had McKinney been a guest of the real "Fidel" to be exploited by Castro's G-2 at Las Maristas and later returned to Vietnam?

Another Cuban installation was near Ba Vi, where numerous sightings of "white buffalos" [i.e., American POWs] were made by South Vietnamese undergoing "reeducation" in the North. According to one of the recently returned Vietnamese 34-A commandos, he saw 60 American POWs at the Thanh Tri Prison complex in 1969.(27) Also in the same prison complex were approximately 100 French and Moroccan POWs captured in the early 1950s. Later the French and Moroccans were transferred to the Ba Vi Prison complex near the Cuban facility. There were a small number of American POWs held for a while in a section of the Thanh Tri Prison complex, appropriately dubbed "Skidrow". However, they numbered about 20, not 60, and none had been held with French and/or Moroccan POWs.[see End Notes]

The commando's report corroborates numerous other similar sightings; however, DPMO has made a conscious effort to discredit all of these reports--although from unrelated sources and too numerous to ignore.

Other Cuban Involvement

Several reports indicate that Cubans were piloting MIGs in aerial combat with American pilots over North Vietnam. One American advisor flying in an H-34 used a M-79 grenade launcher to shoot down a Cuban flying a biplane in Northern Laos.(28) This was the same kind of plane used in the attack against Lima Site 85--the top-secret base in Laos providing guidance for American planes in the bombing of North Vietnam.

The involvement with American POWs was just a part of Cuba's long history of commitment to assist the Vietnamese communists, and just another chapter in their role as "communist internationales" on behalf of the Soviet Union. The Cubans first showed up in Vietnam not too many years after they consolidated power on their own island in the early 1960s. Soon after, the

Cubans soon began operating en masse alongside their Vietnamese brethren. They even accompanied the North Vietnamese through the gates of the South Vietnamese Presidential Palace in Saigon on April 29, 1975.(21) However, the Cuban's assistance to the North Vietnamese continued well beyond 1975.

Raul Valdes Vivo: The creditation of Raul Valdes Vivo as a journalist, however, was only a cover, for he was in fact a DGI (Cuban Intelligence) officer and a high-ranking Cuban communist party member. [Latinos often hyphenate their last name in recognization of the matrilineal side of the family. Therefore, the last name of Raul Valdes Vivo (Valdes-Vivo), may in fact be Valdes. However, he will be referred to as Vivo in this paper.] In his book, El Gran Secreto: Cubanos en el Camino Ho Chi Minh, Vivo wrote that he first met Marta Rojas in 1965 at a Cuban Communist party meeting. Vivo was the Cuban communist party representative to the IndoChinese communist party from 1965 thru 1974.(21)

Vivo claims to have established a Cuban embassy in the jungle in Vietnam in South Viet Nam in 1969. The truth is Vivo was attached to the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), the central command for North Vietnam's operations in South Vietnam, which was located well inside Cambodia. Much to the chagrin of the Vietnamese, Vivo was assigned to COSVN upon the insistency of Raul Castro, Fidel's brother, who was head of the Cuban armed forces. The Vietnamese reluctantly acquiesced, since Cuba was supplying several thousand soldiers to build, maintain and guard a sizeable portion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and providing a large amount of other "technical" and material assistance. COSVN was in fact a front for a front. [For propaganda purposes, the North Vietnamese maintained that COSVN was the headquarters for the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF), a political arm of the Viet Cong. However, in fact, the NLF was a "front" for Hanoi, and COSVN was entirely controlled by the North Vietnamese. It was the North Vietnamese headquarters for staging and directing operations into South Vietnam.]

During a reception in Cuba for a high-ranking Vietnamese communist party official, in a loud voice, Castro chided Vivo for not inviting him to "his embassy." In fact, Castro wasn't at all chiding Vivo, for the barb was aimed at the North Vietnamese for not inviting Castro to COSVN headquarters in Cambodia. Vivo responded by telling Castro the difficulty in accessing "his embassy" after Cambodian General Lön Nol's coup d'etat 1970, indicating that Castro's safety in Cambodia could not be assured.

Vivo was evidently in charge of Cuban intelligence in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Initially, the soviet-block subversion of Cambodia was coordinated by the Cubans out of the Cuban embassy in Phnom Penh. After General Lon Nol took over in 1970, the intelligence staff of the Cuban Embassy in Phnom Penh

was moved into Hanoi along with a core of Vietnamese trained high-ranking Khmer Rouge officials to form a "Cambodian government in exile." In another section of his book, Vivo refers to himself as the Cuban Ambassador "in" Hanoi in 1971.

Later in his book, Vivo says that Cubans were with the North Vietnamese communists in 1975 when they took over Saigon, "although a modest presence." These statements are very important, for historians have yet to admit the extent of the involvement of Cuba and the other Soviet-Bloc in the directing the Vietnam War as part of the "communist internationale."

Vietnamese in Cuba

While a POW in Hanoi, I was interrogated by "The Lump" and another individual who had a Spanish accent. After learning about the "Cuban Program" upon release, I assumed the person with the Spanish accent might have been "Fidel." After my release in 1973, I identified "The Lump" in a photograph taken in Cuba shown to me by a member of a Congressional committee. In the picture, "The Lump" was with a U.S. anti-war contingent. I was told that he had been identified by intelligence agents as being responsible for funneling KGB money to the American anti-war groups, such as those that Jane Fonda led.(9)

The foreign affairs element of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, code named "CP-72," was positioned only 90 miles off the coast of Florida during the war and their personnel worked closely with the Cuban Government in manipulating the anti-war movement in the United States. Many of the propaganda themes directed at influencing groups in the United States were developed from information gathered by "CP-72" and was fed to the Cuban interrogation experts who were involved in exploiting American POWS in Vietnam for propaganda.(29).

Also, CIA and DIA reports reveal the operation of an international communist youth training center southeast of Santiago de Cuba in the mid-and-late 1960s. The young people, many of whom were blacks and Vietnamese, were being trained for subversive operations against the United States. One intelligence source reported that many of these young people were children of French soldiers who had either defected to the Vietnamese communists during the French Indochina or were children of French forces who were POWs and still held by the Hanoi communists. Reportedly, they had been given Vietnamese wives, and the children were taken away from their parents at a very young age and sent to communist youth camps similar to those in the Soviet Union and "Hitler's Children" in Nazi Germany.(30)

According to a DIA source, their control officer was Jesus Jiminez Escobar. "The students (agents) were to be infiltrated into the United States through normal airlift channels and would

be claimed by relatives on their arrival." "Their subversive activities against the United States would include sabotage in connection with race riots..."16 Another DIA source said that "the 5th contingent was infiltrated into the U.S. from Canada through Calais, Maine."17

The same source said that DIA also monitored a center in Cuba during the same period where Vietnamese were being trained by the Cubans in POW interrogation methods. "Fidel", "Chico", and the other Cubans associated with the "Cuban Program" in Hanoi in all likelihood may have been staff associated with this center. Maj. Fernando Vecino Alegret, "Chico", has an extensive background in youth movements. This presumption is strengthened by the debriefing reports of American POWs who were in the "Cuban Program." They reported that "a large number of VN officer trainees" came to the camp, and the Cubans "Conducted interrogation training, using [American] POWs."[DPMO] The trainees were estimated to be approximately 20 years of age. One would logically assume that this was in-service training of Vietnamese graduates from the training camp in Cuba.

Vietnamese and Soviet Bloc Research on American POWs

The Cubans used standard scientific methologies in selecting American POWs for the "Cuban Program;" i.e., random selection with a control group. Everett Alvarez was initially interviewed for the "Program" but was disqualified purportedly because he was of Spanish decent and presumed to speak Spanish.(5)

A 1975 secret CIA counterintelligence study states that the Medical Office of Hanoi's Ministry of Public Security (MPSMO) was responsible for "preparing studies and performing research on the most effective Soviet, French, communist Chinese and other...techniques..." of extracting information from POWs. The MPSMO "...supervised the use of torture and the use of drugs to induce [American] prisoners to cooperate." MPSMO's functions also "...included working with Soviet and Communist Chinese intelligence advisors who were qualified in the use of medical techniques for intelligence purposes. .... The Soviets and Chinese...were... interested in research studies on the reactions of American prisoners to various psychological and medical techniques..."(32)

The "Cuban Program" in Vietnam parallels that of a similar Soviet program in Korea according to congressional testimony on September 17, 1996 by General Jan Sejana, the highest ranking defector from the Soviet Block during the "Cold War."(33) After defecting, Sejana worked for years as a top-secret analyst for the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency. According to Gen. Sejana,"Americans were used to test physiological and psychological endurance and various mind control drugs. Moscow ordered Czechoslovakia to build a hospital in North Korea for the

experiments [on American POWs] there." As in North Korean, Soviet, East German, Czechoslovakian and Cuban "medical specialists" were assigned to the top-secret "Hospital 198" in Hanoi where American POWs were believed to have been taken for "treatment".(34) This would have been the hospital where at least one of the American POWs in the "Cuban Program" was taken for shock treatment.[35]

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Gen. Sejana had been in charge of communist Czechoslovakia's Defense Council Secretariat, and from 1964 on, First Secretary at the Ministry of Defense. In his various official capacities, he was constantly meeting with Soviet officials, receiving instructions, and relaying those instructions to various Czech agencies and departments. "At the beginning of the Korean War, we received directions from Moscow to build a military hospital in North Korea. ..... The Top Secret purpose of the hospital was to experiment on American and South Korean POWs. .... It was very important to the Soviet plans because they believed it was essential to understand the manner in which different drugs...affected different races and people who had been brought up differently; for example on better diets. .... Because America was the main enemy, American POWs were the most highly valued experimental subjects. .... I want to point out that the same things happened in Vietnam and Laos during the Vietnam War. The only difference is the operation in Vietnam was better planned and more American POWs were used, both in Vietnam and Laos and in the Soviet Union."

Several sets of remains of American servicemen repatriated from Vietnam evidenced that they were of POWs who had suffered severe and depraved conditions long after the purported release of all POWs in 1973. The skull of one had been sawn open, evidence of an autopsy as part of an experiment common to Soviet-style research on the affect of certain drugs on the brain.(36)

Cuba's End Game in Vietnam

According to a DIA "asset", after the signing of the cease-fire on January 21, 1973, 4,000 Cuban army engineers arrived in Hanoi. They helped rebuild the Phuc Yen/Da Phuc Airfield North of Hanoi where, according to intelligence reports, American POWs were used as technicians after the war. Later, the Cubans disappeared into the mountains of the north and constructed and eqvuipped secret bases about 100 km from the Chinese border between Monkai and Laokai. Here, the Soviets equipped the bases with mobile launch ramps, medium-range strategic missiles, possibly with tactical nuclear warheads, capable of hitting population centers in the southern part of China.(17) This is the same area where the above mentioned POW camp containing American prisoners "disappeared, guards and all."(25)

Units of this same Cuban engineering contingent were building the airfield in Grenada when Americans overran the island. U.S. military intelligence captured reams of documents and photographs relating to this unit's operations in Vietnam. However, no evidence has surfaced that these documents were ever analyzed for information on POWs by DPMO or any intelligence agency.

In the spirit of communist solidarity, Hanoi reciprocated for Cuba's assistance during the Vietnam war by sending U.S. arms and ammunition, captured in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, to South America to fuel the "revolution" directed by the Cubans there. As agents of the Soviets, and continuing their belief in the communist internationale, the Cuban government expanded its role in the communist internationale.

The Cubans sent troops to Angola. In 1975, Vivo again surfaces in Angola posing as a journalist. Vivo "interviewed" western mercenaries who were put on trail in a "kangaroo court" in yet another slanted propaganda coup against the U.S. One of the mercenaries was an American who's body has yet to be recovered.(13)

Evidently, Cuba's partnership with Vietnam in subversive activities against the U.S. has continued. In 1996, Jane's Defense Weekly reported that "Vietnam has been training Cuban Special Forces troops to undertake limited attacks in the USA... .... Havana's strategy in pursuing such training is to attack the staging and supply areas for U.S. forces preparing to invade Cuba. .... The training program is focused on seaborne and underwater operations, roughly comparable to those assigned to U.S. Navy Seals. .... The political objective would be to bring the reality of warfare to the American public and so exert domestic pressure on Washington."(37)

Vietnam and Cuba are closely linked by their belief in exporting international communism. Hanoi praised Cuba for its shootdown of two American planes and denounced the Helms-Burton Bill as "Insolent!" Hanoi recently reaffirmed the unswerving solidarity of the communist party, the government and people of Vietnam with the Cuban revolution.(38)

Conclusion

The behavior of "Fidel", "Chico" and "Pancho" in the torture and murder of Americans is beyond the pale and is clearly in violation of the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of Prisoners of War, which North Vietnam signed. Allowing these Cubans to go unpunished sets an ugly precedent, and adds to America's growing "paper tiger" image. Although the Cubans' crimes are smaller in number, they are no less than some of the war criminals that are being tried in Bosnia.

If the communist regime in Hanoi was fully cooperating in resolving the POW/MIA issue as President Clinton, Senator John McCain, and Ambassador Pete Peterson profess, the Vietnamese communists would have turned over to the U.S. the names of the Cubans who tortured and killed American POWs in the "Cuban Program." Full cooperation by the communist government in Hanoi includes the full disclosure of the true identities and roles of these Cuban "diplomats", who were "advisors" to the Hanoi prison system, and were directly responsible for the murder, torture, and severe disablement of American POWs.

Although the "Cuban Program" was reviewed by the Department of Defense's Prisoner of War and Missing in Action Office (DPMO), its analysis was incomplete. DPMO's chief analyst Robert Destatte's claims that the "Vietnamese's story is plausible and fully consistent with what DPMO knows about the conduct of the Cubans in question" are ludicrous and grossly incompetent. DPMO's analysis of the "Cuban Program" is glaringly incomplete, indicating either incompetence, negligence, or an attempt at political correctness in keeping with our present policy toward Cuba.

DPMO did not thoroughly, nor competently, analyze the documentation they presented to Congress, and other related material including:

-- POW debriefing reports containing the statements by the camp commander that the 'Cuban Program' "was a Hanoi University Psychological Study."

-- POW debriefing reportings that clearly state that the Vietnamese camp commander ("The Lump"), cadre and guards were well aware of, and often participated in, the torture.

-- the CIA report, North Viet-Nam: The Responsibilities of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam Intelligence and Security Services in the Exploitation of American Prisoners of War.

-- DIA reports on the training of Vietnamese prison interrogators by the Cubans.

-- no mention of the interviews and photographs made by Cuban journalists cited in documentation, and no there is no indication that it attempted to pursue the Cuban connection.

-- obtaining information from FBI files relating to the "Cuban Program," reports by Cuban refugees of American POWs from Vietnam being held in Cuba, or electronic and other surveillance of Eduardo Morjon Esteves during his "service" at the United Nations.

-- no attempt to obtain the intelligence information relating to their operations in Vietnam garnered from the seizure documents by Army intelligence from the Cuban engineers building the airfield in Granada during the U.S. incursion of that island.

End Notes

DPMO maintains, as did the defunct Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, that there is no conclusive evidence that American POWs were left behind in Vietnam after "Operation Homecoming" in March 1973. However, eyewitness reports, such as Col. Odell's, and numerous intelligence documents, belie these claims. Pentagon officials weren't the only ones who wanted to keep this secret, and it wasn't only because of third-country diplomatic ramifications. The Nixon Administration, and chief negotiator Henry Kissinger, in particular, wanted to hide the fact that POWs had been left behind in their haste to close the chapter on the Vietnam War.

There are numerous intelligence reports of a group of American POWs seen north of Hanoi, who were suffering from severe war wounds or mental disorders. They were still being held because the communists feared their release would have an unfavorable impact on public opinion. It is very likely that these POWs are the ones who simply disappeared at Monkai and Laokai, for conspicuously absent from the Operation Homecoming release in 1973 were POWs suffering from severe war wounds (amputees) and mental illnesses.

An abnormal, disproportionate number of Americans captured in Laos were never released. Although the CIA has acknowledged that approximately 600 men are missing in action in Laos, given the nature of the "Secret War," it is reasonable to presume that the number could be much higher. The fact that out of the 600 acknowledged missing in Laos, only 10 persons survived is unbelievable. Only 10 were released. When the North Vietnamese communists negotiated the treaty to end the IndoChina War with the French in 1954, they never acknowledged the capture of POWs in Laos. A 1969 RAND report warned that when the U.S. negotiated with the dogmatic Vietnamese communists, they would most likely again deny that they captured any American POWs in Laos. U.S. intelligence showed that over 82% of American losses in Laos were in areas under total control of the North Vietnamese.

American POWs captured in Laos were likely candidates for "transfer" to other Soviet Bloc countries, such as Cuba, since the Vietnamese considered them as "free commodities."

Much of DOD's analysis of POW camps and evaluations of live sighting reports are based on the time-frame that the camps were

occupied by POWs who returned in 1973. Therefore, if a live sighting pertains to a period of time that does not correspond to the time it was occupied by returned POWs, it is most often disregarded or debunked. Also, the analysts often failed to take into consideration the fact that many of these camps were vast complexes with annexes often hundreds of kilometers apart that have the same name as the main camp. An excellent example is the Son Tay POW camps, one north of Hanoi and the other south of Hanoi. Thus, if a live sighting report correlates to the name of a camp but the coordinates are different from the main camp, the live sighting may be discounted. This is what happened in the case of most of the Thanh Tri complex and Ba Vi Prison live sighting reports.

DPMO analysts, and DOD's Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (which conducts on-the-ground investigation of live sighting reports in Vietnam), discredits most live sighting reports by providing the names of the sources to the Vietnamese communist secret services weeks before interviews--a violation of good intelligence procedures, who subsequently disappear or are coerced; or by simply discrediting the sources because they had been political prisoners. However, DPMO's Bob Destatte uses these same sources (political prisoners) to vilify "Bobby" Garwood, a detainee who was courtmartialed for collaboration with the Vietnamese communists and reported live sightings of Americans in Vietnam. If many of the reports are "triangulated," several live-sightings from unrelated sources are very similar--too much so to be mere coincidence (e.g., "white buffalos").

For some unfathomable reason, DOD sent pilots, who had worked in top-secret projects such as the atomic energy program, on tactical bombing missions over North Vietnam only to be shot down and captured. The loss of a great many planes over North Vietnam could have been easily avoided. According to National Security Council advisor William Stearman (1971-76 & 1981-93), "One of the untold scandals of the Vietnam War was the refusal of battleship foes [i.e., within the Pentagon] to follow an expert panel's advice and deploy them to Vietnam until it was too late. Of all the targets struck by air in North Vietnam, with a loss of 1,067 aircraft and air crews, 80 percent could have been taken out by a battleship's 16-inch guns without endangering American lives or aircraft."(39)

The loss of pilots was further exacerbated by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's Dr. Strangelove-like obsession of directing targets to be bombed at the same time every day. To some, it seemed as if DOD, led by McNamara, was intentionally aiding the communists by providing them with some of our best and brightest military minds [e.g., one F-111 pilot was shot down over North Vietnam shortly after leaving the Gemini space program.] Concurrently the Soviet equivalent to the Gemini program made quantum leaps over the next two years in the area of

the F-111 pilot's specialty. An F-111 capsule was found in a Russian museum by U.S. investigators. There are several other similar examples of vast improvement in communist technologies after the capture of these pilots. According to DIA's "asset", the American POWs were "a gold mine of information to brief ... specialists in the technologies used by the enemy."

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Statement By

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

(POW/Missing Personnel Affairs)

Robert L. Jones

Congressional Hearing

on

"The Cuban Program"

Before the

House Committee on International Relations

November 4, 1999

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Good morning Chairman Gilman and distinguished Committee Members. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Prisoner Of War/Missing Personnel Affairs and Director of the Defense Prisoner Of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), I welcome today's opportunity to address the Committee on the role my office, and its predecessor, the Defense Intelligence Agency's Special Office on POW/MIA Affairs, has had in the so-called "Cuban Program." I ask that my statement, in its entirety, be entered in the record of this hearing. As you are aware Mr. Chairman, we became aware of the Cuban Program immediately following Operation Homecoming and have shared our knowledge with the appropriate agencies and the Congress.

Mr. Chairman, I am humbled to follow the group of former POWs who have addressed your Committee. None of us can fully understand the trying experiences and inhumane treatment that they endured while in captivity. These men sacrificed greatly for this nation; they are truly American heroes whose sacrifices stretch the limits of one's imagination.

The mission of my agency is to account for those American heroes who were lost while serving in foreign lands and have not returned to American soil. Currently, 2,047 Americans remain unaccounted for in Southeast Asia. My office pursues the resolution of those cases by using a number of investigative tools. We have received more than 21,000 reports possibly pertaining to Americans in Southeast. Unfortunately none have led us to the return of a single live American. We also employ robust Archival Research and Oral History Programs, as well as unilateral and trilateral investigations in each of the three Southeast Asian countries. These methods have produced significant investigative leads that have led to a number of resolved cases. We continue to pursue all avenues with live Americans as our number one priority.

As my staff explained in their September briefing to Representative Ros-Lehtinen, our ability to accomplish this humanitarian mission is wholly dependent on the willingness of foreign governments around the globe to allow American POW/MIA specialists access to their territory, their citizens, and their historical records. I firmly believe that any attempt on the part of the Department of Defense to merge investigations of war crimes into our accounting activities may jeopardize our ability to accomplish our humanitarian mission. DPMO is not a criminal investigative arm of the federal government; our mission is separate. We are charged with the fullest possible accounting for U.S. military and certain American civilian personnel who became missing as a result of hostile action. Our mission is humanitarian in nature, not linked to other bilateral foreign policy concerns.

DPMO's role with regard to the "Cuban Program" has been to act as a repository of historical information and to insure it is available to the appropriate federal agencies. The sensitivities associated with our humanitarian accounting

mission clearly prohibit us from any involvement in the pursuit of the perpetrators of these misdeeds.

I was informed that on October 29th, Ambassador Peterson met with Mr. Hung, Director of the Americas Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to request the assistance of the Government of Vietnam in supplying information about the Cuban interrogators of American POWs from 1967 to 1968. Mr. Hung listened with interest and responded that he would research the questions presented in the talking points that the Ambassador left with him. We all look forward to his response.

Closing remarks

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we share the same sense of outrage that you and the members of your Committee do regarding the tortuous abuse endured by our Prisoners of War at the hands of these three presumed Cuban interrogators. However, pursuit of these criminals by my agency has the real potential to disrupt our mission to return our men, or their remains, to their families—many of whom have waited for more than 50 years for such answers. Put simply, I do not recommend my office taking such action when it has the potential to jeopardize the hopes of the families of our missing.

I recommend that requests for further investigation of the "Cuban Program" be directed to the appropriate agencies that are chartered to pursue violations of the law of armed conflict. DPMO eagerly stands ready to continue to provide information to this interagency group as necessary. We will continue our policy of transparency – making available our historical files on these issues.

Before I close, I would like to introduce a member of my staff, Mr. Robert DeStatte, a senior Southeast Asia POW/MIA analyst. Mr. DeStatte can address any technical questions you or the committee may have in detail.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement.

Testimony of Mr. Robert J. Destatte,
Senior Analyst, Research & Analysis Directorate,
Defense Prisoner of War and Missing in Action Office,
before the Committee on International Relations,
House of Representatives, Congress of the United States
November 4, 1999

"The CUBAN Program": Torture of American Prisoners by Cuban Agents"

Good morning Chairman Gilman and distinguished Committee Members. I join Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Jones in saluting the American heroes who shared with the Committee this morning their experiences as victims of what has become known as the "Cuban Program." Thank you for the opportunity to present an overview of the historical record of efforts by the Department of Defense and other Federal agencies to answer questions about the "Cuban Program." I ask that my statement, in its entirety, be entered into the record of this hearing.

I would like to begin with a brief description of the "Cuban Program."

What Was The "Cuban Program"?

American POWs coined the term "Cuban Program" to describe a program in which a small team of Caucasian interrogators brutally beat and tortured 19 American aviators in a camp our POWs nicknamed "the Zoo," in Hanoi, between July 1967 and August 1968. One of the POWs, USAF Major Earl G. Cobeil, eventually died from the beatings.

The Caucasian interrogators spoke English fluently, but with a Spanish accent, and spoke knowledgeably about Central America and the Southeastern United States. In an exchange with one of our POWs, a Vietnamese guard referred to the Caucasian interrogators as Cubans. These and other factors led many of the POWs and analysts to believe that the interrogators were Cubans, possibly Cubans who had lived in the United States.

The POWs nicknamed the chief Caucasian interrogator "Fidel." They nicknamed his principal assistant "Chico."

Several days before the "Cuban Program" ended a third man the POWs nicknamed variously "Pancho" and "Garcia" appeared to replace "Fidel."

The POWs observed another man who might have been Cuban working as an electrical technician in the POW camp during the closing months of the program. They also heard the voice of a woman they believed was Cuban on the camp radio for about two weeks near the end of the program.

When did the Department of Defense first learn about the "Cuban Program"?

The DOD first learned about the "Cuban Program" in March 1973 when the reports of the first post-homecoming debriefings began arriving at DIA's POW/MIA office.

How did the Department of Defense respond to these first reports?

By 19 March 1973, nearly two weeks before the last POW was released, the DIA's POW/MIA Office had brought this issue to the attention of senior DOD officials.

By the 23rd of March, the US government had established a coordinated effort to learn the identity of the "Cubans".

That effort involved the DIA, each of the Armed Services, the National Security Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee's Chief Investigator.

In April 1974, the CIA informed the Defense Intelligence Agency that CIA analysts had tentatively identified the interrogator nicknamed "Fidel" as one Luis Perez, also known as Luis Perez Jaen, a Captain in the Cuban Ministry of Interior. This Captain:

- was in Hanoi during the "Cuban Program,"
- had a history of interrogating foreigners in Cuba, and
- was in the US during 1956-1957, buying and shipping arms to Cuba.
- possessed most of the physical and personality traits of "Fidel" that our POWs had described.

The CIA provided DIA a copy of a photograph of Luis Perez Jaen that was published in the Cuban newspaper "Oriente" on 25 February 1959. The photograph, which we have shared with the Committee, depicts Perez Jaen wearing a military cap and a full beard.

Between November 1975 and mid-1976 US Air Force investigators asked seven victims of the "Cuban Program" to examine this photograph of Luis Perez Jaen. Six of theses men could not state positively that he was the interrogator they nicknamed "Fidel," primarily because the photo depicts him wearing a full beard. One of the seven men, Colonel Donald Waltman, wrote in a 16 April 1976 note to a US Air Force investigator: "I say yes, that's Fidel; or at least a guy who looks too much like him. I have to try to imagine him clean shaven, and when I do its him. (Maybe because I'd like to I.D. him so damn bad). Its the most look like Fidel picture I have seen."

Also in April 1974, the CIA informed the DIA that "Chico" might be a Cuban named Veiga (first name unknown), an employee of the Cuban Department of State Security. Reportedly, Veiga had studied at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA, during 1958-59. An extensive follow up investigation by US Air Force investigators failed to confirm the identity of this person.

Other names have been suggested over the years; however, subsequent investigations either ruled them out or proved inconclusive. For example, the DIA POW/MIA Office provided historical information about the "Cuban Program" to the FBI when it investigated a 1987 report that a Cuban employee of the United Nations might be one of the Cuban interrogators. The FBI worked closely with returned POWs in that investigation; however, the POWs could not positively identify the Cuban at the United Nations as one of the men who tortured them in Hanoi.

Recent news stories suggest that the Cuban Minister of Education, Fernando Vecino Alegret, is the interrogator our POWs nicknamed Fidel. Fernando Vecino Alegret first came to our attention shortly before he visited the U.S. in November 1978. At that time federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies examined the possibility that he was the interrogator named Fidel. We have been searching our historical files for any record we might have received from those agencies concerning Fernando Vecino Alegret. Two days ago we discovered a still classified September 1973 report that described Fernando Vecino Alegret as an engineering graduate who studied at the University of Havana during 1962-1965. The report also stated that he founded the Cuban Military Technical Institute (ITM) in September 1966, and that he was its director from September 1966 until January 1973. We have not yet had time to confirm the origin and reliability of that report; however, if the information in the report is accurate, there is little chance that Fernando Vecino Alegret could be the interrogator "Fidel."

Among the names we have received, the two names the CIA suggested in April 1974 remain the most likely candidates for the interrogators nicknamed "Fidel" and "Chico."

What Was The Purpose Of The "Cuban Program?"

The only information we have concerning the purpose of the Cuban Program comes from the American POWs who were victims and two Vietnamese military officers.

The preponderance of information in our files suggests that the "Cuban Program" was a Cuban assistance program that went awry and that the Vietnamese terminated the program shortly after the interrogator nicknamed "Fidel" beat Major Cobeil into a near catatonic state from which he never recovered.

Has The Department Of Defense Kept The Congress Informed?

The Department of Defense has kept the Congress informed about the "Cuban Program" from the very beginning. For example, the DPMO's predecessor office, the Defense Intelligence Agency's Special Office for POW/MIA Affairs, presented testimony about the "Cuban Program" to the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee during hearings on 2 July 1973, about three months after the last American POW was released. A former POW who was a victim of the program, US Navy Lieutenant Commander Larry Spencer, also testified before the subcommittee.

Later, the DIA's POW/MIA office provided historical information to the subcommittee's Chief Investigator, Mr. Alfonso L. Tarabochia, who conducted an independent effort to identify the interrogators.

By September 1974, Mr. Tarabochia had tentatively concluded that "Fidel" possibly was a Cuban named Pedro Fumero. Unfortunately, the returned POWs who were victims of "Fidel" could not identify Fumero as one of their interrogators.

The DPMO's DIA predecessor office also provided an appraisal to the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee on 6 October 1977. More recently, the DPMO provided updates on the "Cuban Program" to Congressman Dornan on 23 March 1987, 22 August 1996, and 11 and 17 September 1996.

Has the Department of Defense kept the public informed about this issue?

The story about the "Cuban Program" is not new. For example, I have here eight news articles about the "Cuban Program" published in 1973, 1977, and 1981 in Washington, DC, New York, Baltimore, Denver, and Des Moines. These articles are based on information released by the DPMO's predecessor, the DIA's POW/MIA office, and personal accounts by POWs who were victims of the program.

What about the recent article in the Miami Herald?

I would like to comment briefly for the public record about recent press reports about the "Cuban Program." News reports published in the Miami Herald on 22 August 1999 and the Seattle Times on 28 October 1999 suggested that this issue was "Concealed for decades by official U.S. secrecy and...the full story of Fidel and the so-called Cuba Program is finally becoming public." The same articles speculated that the reason the story has drawn little attention is "Perhaps...because most POWs obeyed Pentagon orders to keep quiet, to protect POWs who might remain in Vietnam and perhaps because Fidel's identification as a Cuban was then only an unconfirmed allegation by the POWs."

The facts are that Department of Defense officials asked the POWs who were returning during Operation Homecoming in 1973 to not speak out publicly about the torture until after the last POW was released. The last POW was released on 1 April 1973. The first stories by returned POWs about the "Cuban Program" appeared in American newspapers the next day, on 2 April 1973.

Some of the sources cited in the articles portray DPMO's role incorrectly. We are not a counterintelligence office or a law enforcement office. Our mission is humanitarian. It is to account for American servicemen who were lost while serving abroad. All American victims of the "Cuban Program" are accounted for.

Successive Administrations, the Congress, the Department of State, the DIA, the DPMO, the Pacific Command's Joint Task Force—Full Accounting, the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory, the National League of Families--literally thousands of Americans--have worked hard for many years to build and sustain programs that today are allowing us to account for Americans lost in the old Soviet Union, North Korea, Southeast Asia, and other areas in the world.

As DASD Jones stated earlier, our mission humanitarian and it is worldwide. Our ability to accomplish our mission is dependent wholly on the willingness of foreign governments to allow our POW/MIA specialists to have access to their citizens, records, and territory.

Suggestions that DPMO should investigate war crimes risk undoing the results of years of hard work and jeopardize our ability to accomplish our humanitarian mission.

What Is DPMO's Role With Regard To The "Cuban Program"?

DPMO is a central repository for historical information concerning the American POW/MIA issue. As DASD Jones stated earlier, DPMO stands ready to share historical information and knowledge about the program with appropriate US agencies.

Conclusion: The history of this issue is that the POW/MIA office informed senior Department of Defense officials immediately upon learning about the actions of the presumably Cuban interrogators. Those officials immediately directed appropriate intelligence and investigative agencies to try to identify those interrogators. In 1974 CIA analysts tentatively identified two Cuban officials as the interrogators nicknamed "Fidel" and "Chico." Their victims, however, were not able to confirm the identities. We also have kept the Congress and public informed. We will remain a repository of historical information about all aspects of the POW/MIA issue, and remain ready to share that historical information with appropriate federal intelligence or investigative offices. However, as DASD Jones stated earlier, we believe that DPMO should not become involved in efforts to investigate the "Cuban Program" and jeopardize our accounting mission.

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DEMOCRATIC CHIEF OF STAFF

September 24, 1999

The Honorable Louis J. Freeh, Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D.C. 20535

Dear Director Freeh:

As you may be aware, I am conducting preliminary briefings and gathering information in preparation for hearings to be held by the House Committee on International Relations regarding the "Cuba Program" -- the use of Cuban agents for the systematic torturing of American POWs in Vietnam.

An integral part of this process is the identification of the Cuban torturers known as "Fidel", "Garcia", and "Chico." We have received information placing all or some of the Cuban torturers in New York during the 1960s visiting the Cuban mission at the United Nations under the guise of diplomats. Further, we have received reports relating the travel of the torturers to the U.S. as recently as this year.

To continue the discovery process, I would like to request a briefing from the Bureau for Thursday, September 30th. While I realize your officials will not be able to compile all the data by this date, we would appreciate as much information as possible by Thursday, to be followed by a complete submission of data at a later date. Further, my colleagues and me request the following for the briefing:

- Assessment of location and extent of material (including photos, logs, interviews, and other methods) obtained by and available to the Bureau on Cuban officials visiting the Cuban mission in New York and the Cuban Interest Section in Washington, D.C. during the 1960s and early 1970s.
- Process to be used to compile and assess the aforementioned data, and cross-reference with recent data.
- Time line for providing both raw data, accompanied by summary and analysis.
- Names and contact information of personnel tasked to activities at the U.N. mission and the Interest Section during the 1960s and 1970s, and personnel knowledgeable of related Bureau actions during this period.

I greatly appreciate your assistance in this matter and look forward to the briefing.

Sincerely,

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress

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DEMOCRATIC CHIEF OF STAFF

October 6, 1999

Hon. Doris Meissner
Commissioner
U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service
Department of Justice
Washington, D.C.

Via FAX: (202) 514-1117

Dear Commissioner Meissner:

I am writing to request your assistance in obtaining information about the travel to the United States and visas granted to Fernando Vecino Alegret, a Cuban official who has been identified as one of the Cuban agents in the "Cuba Program" -- a project tasked with the systematic torturing of American POWs in Vietnam.

As you may be aware, I have been conducting preliminary briefings and gathering information in preparation for hearings to be held in the near future by the House Committee on International Relations regarding this issue. Meetings have been held with officials from the Department of Defense DPMO unit, the FBI, former POWs knowledgeable of the events which took place at the camp known as "the Zoo" where the "Cuba Program" was implemented, as well as survivors of the "Cuba Program."

Based on these and personal statements by Mr. Vecino Alegret in a book published by the Cuban government, we have obtained data which places Mr. Vecino Alegret in various cities of Louisiana, as a chemical engineering student at the University of Alabama, and in Florida in the late 1950s, as well as in other parts of the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s. He may have been granted visas to the United States in recent years.

I request that you provide me with all information related to the number of trips taken by Mr. Vecino Alegret, the purpose of the travel, and type of visa granted. Due to the foreign policy implications of Cuban travel, I have requested the Department of State to coordinate this request with you to ensure a comprehensive approach to the request.

Congressman Benjamin Gilman, Chairman of the House International Relations Committee, and I greatly appreciate your cooperation. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or have your staff call Yleem Poblete or Mauricio Tamargo of my staff at (202) 225-3345 or Caleb McCarry of Chairman Gilman's staff at (202) 225-5021.

Sincerely,

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress

cc: Hon. Benjamin A. Gilman, Chairman
House International Relations Committee

Hon. Janet Reno
U.S. Attorney General

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DEMOCRATIC CHIEF OF STAFF

October 6, 1999

Hon. Douglas B. Peterson
U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam
7 Lang Ha Road
Ba Dinh District

Via FAX: (84) (4) 835-0484

Dear Ambassador Peterson:

I am writing to request your assistance in obtaining from the Vietnamese government all information on the "Cuba Program" -- the use of Cuban agents for the systematic torturing of American POWs in Vietnam.

As you may be aware, I am conducting preliminary briefings and gathering information in preparation for hearings to be held in the near future by the House Committee on International Relations regarding this issue. Meetings have been held with officials from the Department of Defense DPMO unit, the FBI, former POWs knowledgeable of the events which took place at the camp known as "the Zoo" where the "Cuba Program" was implemented, as well as survivors of the "Cuba Program."

However, additional information is required focusing on the years 1967 and 1968 and including, but not limited to, (1) lists of all foreign personnel -- military or "civilian" -- stationed at or who visited "the Zoo" with the country they were from and/or represented; (2) specific data on the tasks each were assigned; (3) information documenting the origin, objectives, funding source and parties involved in the "Cuba Program" including data on who -- that is, which individuals and governments -- sanctioned the project.

I request that you request this information as soon as possible to provide an opportunity for the Vietnamese government to demonstrate its willingness to cooperate and be forthcoming in this and other important matters.

Congressman Benjamin Gilman, Chairman of the House International Relations Committee, and I greatly appreciate your cooperation. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or have your staff call Yleem Poblete or Mauricio Tamargo of my staff at (202) 225-3345.

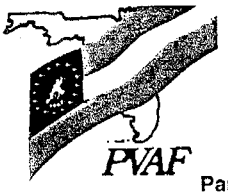
Sincerely,

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress

cc: Hon. Benjamin A. Gilman, Chairman
House International Relations Committee

Hon. Stanley O. Roth
Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

OCT-26-99 TUE 10:00 P.02



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PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA, INC.
CHARTERED BY THE CONGRESS
OF THE UNITED STATES

PVAF **Paralyzed Veterans Association of Florida, Inc.**

6200 N. Andrews Avenue • Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33309 • 954-771-7822 • 1-800-683-2001 • Fax 954-491-3532

October 26, 1999

The Honorable William J. Clinton
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Clinton:

Our organization fully supports the efforts of Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen in requesting a full-scale investigation to uncover the truths of the cruelty of Fidel Castro's government's active participation in crimes committed against Prisoners of War in Vietnam.

We sincerely hope to you, as Commander in Chief will make this issue a priority and direct all the appropriate government agencies to unite with Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen's request.

Our veterans, who served our country, look forward to an optimistic response from your office regarding this matter.

Respectfully,

David Monson

David Monson
President

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November 1, 1999

The Honorable Louis Freeh
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
J. Edgar Hoover Building
9th and Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 22135

Dear ~~Mr. Director~~ Lou:

Our Committee has begun an extensive inquiry into possible Cuban government links to the torture and interrogation of American POWs during the Vietnam war.

Members and staff of our committee have already met with representatives of the FBI. Your staff has been very helpful as we begin our inquiry and hearings into this very serious concern about Cuba's involvement in torture and murder of American military service personnel during the Vietnam era. There is no statute of limitations on these crimes, and the Committee is seeking to identify the men who are responsible.

With the end of the Cold War, we now have the unique opportunity to get cooperation from some of the police and intelligence services that once were our sworn adversaries in periods like the Vietnam War. In the case of American POWs from that conflict, it was long believed that many were brought to Eastern Europe to be further interrogated by their communist captors. Recent democratic changes in Eastern Europe present a real opportunity for us to get to the bottom of the question of Cuban involvement with our POWs.

In particular, we have long believed that some American POWs were taken from Vietnam to Czechoslovakia for interrogation, prolonged incarceration, and possible medical experiments. It would be most helpful if the FBI could contact the various police and security services with whom you now routinely work on transnational crime in the Czech Republic and ascertain if their archives contain any information on our POWs and possible Cuban involvement with these Americans. Alternatively, if that presents any problems for the FBI, it would be helpful if your staff could arrange for our committee investigators to meet with the appropriate authorities in the Czech Republic.

I have long favored an increased FBI presence in the former Soviet Union and worked hard to secure additional Legat positions abroad for the FBI from our State Department. For example, a Legat in Prague, which we very much need, would be in a better position to carry out such an important inquiry. Until then, however, I would hope your Legat Office in Vienna might make such inquiries on the next trip to the Czech Republic and inform our committee of the findings and any documents that might be obtained relative to this matter or, alternatively, whom our staff should contact in the Czech Republic.

As always, we appreciate the cooperative efforts of the FBI, working together with our committee, to advance and protect our national interests both here at home and abroad. The matter before us presents an extraordinary opportunity to improve on that record.

If your office needs any additional information, please have them contact our committee's Investigative Counsel, John Mackey (phone #202-225-5021).

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

BENJAMIN A. GILMAN
Chairman

BAG:jpm/mco

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EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
HANOI

AMBASSADOR

November 4, 1999

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
U.S. House of Representatives
2160 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-0918

Dear Representative Ros-Lehtinen:

Thank you for your letter of October 6 requesting I approach the Vietnamese Government for information on reports of Cuban interrogators of American POWs in 1967-68. I have personally presented your request to the appropriate Vietnamese officials.

Although I am hopeful they can help us with this issue, I want to emphasize that their response to this request is a separate issue from our dealings with the on POW/MIA accounting. The fullest possible accounting of our POW/MIAs from the Vietnam War is our highest priority in Vietnam and I am personally, as well as professionally, committed to this goal. Vietnam's cooperation in our efforts toward "fullest possible accounting" which forms the foundation for our bilateral relations continues at a very high level, and I expect no change in their commitment. In fact, I now consider our relationship relative to the MIA issue as moving toward a partnership rather than simple cooperation.

Given my personal experience, I share and deeply appreciate your abhorrence for the inhumane treatment of POWs by any country. I, too, understand your desire to determine the facts associated with reported Cuban involvement in the treatment of American POWs during the Vietnam conflict. I believe that you have already been briefed by the Department of Defense regarding its efforts to gather information about this, and I am sure DOD has provided useful suggestions on how this issue can be effectively pursued. From my personal perspective, you will gain a wealth of knowledge on the subject by speaking directly with a number of my fellow POWs who had experience with interrogators who they believed to be Cubans while held captive.

I will let you know as soon as I get a response from the Vietnamese.

Sincerely,

Pete Peterson
Ambassador

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2400 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2400

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

22 NOV 1999

In reply, refer to:
I-99/015096

The Honorable Benjamin A. Gilman
Chairman, Committee on International Relations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-6128

Dear Chairman Gilman:

At the close of the November 4, 1999, hearing on the "Cuban Program" before your Committee, you asked that I provide you with information on the history of F-111 losses during the Vietnam War. I am pleased to do so.

As you may know, the F-111 aircraft has a crew of two. Ejection from the aircraft is via a single crew capsule, or pod, that separates from the aircraft during the ejection sequence and descends under a large parachute. Individual ejection is not possible.

During the Vietnam War, between March 28, 1968, the date of the initial F-111 loss, and June 16, 1973, the date of the last F-111 loss, A total of 11 of these aircraft were lost. Eight losses were the result of combat actions and three were operational losses. Twenty-two crewmembers were involved in these 11 losses, and the enclosed information paper details the loss history of the F-111 and its crews during the war. I hope this information is helpful.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your Committee and for your continued support for this important issue. If I can be of further assistance, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Jones
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
(POW/Missing Personnel Affairs)

Enclosure
As stated

ENCL

F-111 Aircraft Losses – Southeast Asia

Information Paper

The following is a breakdown of the combat and operational loss history of the F-111 aircraft and the status of the crews involved in these losses that occurred between March 28, 1968, the date of the initial F-111 loss, and June 16, 1973, during the Vietnam War.

Type Loss	*# A/C Lost*	*Crew*	*Final Crew Status*
Combat	1	crew survived	captured and repatriated
	1	crew killed	remains returned; identified
	1	crashsite excavated	minimal remains found, work continues
	1	crashsite excavated	no remains found; evidence indicates crew did not eject
	1	crashsite located	excavation planned (Laos)
	2	lost over water	sites not located
	1	downed over land	site not yet located

	# A/C Lost and Reason	*Crew Status*
Operational	1 -- hydraulic failure	ejected and recovered
	1 -- take-off accident	crewmembers survived
	1 -- mid-air collision	ejected and recovered.

SUMMARY

Number of F-111s lost in Southeast Asia:	11
Number of Crewmen Involved:	22
Number of Crewmen Captured:	2
Number of Crewmen that Survived:	8
Number of Crewmen who Died:	14

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December 15, 1999

The Honorable Robert L. Jones
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Prisoner of War and Missing Personnel Affairs
Department of Defense
Washington, D.C.

Dear Deputy Assistant Secretary Jones:

Thank you for appearing before the Committee on International Relations on November 4, 1999 with Mr. Robert Destatte, chief analyst in the POW/Missing Personnel Office, to review facts regarding the torture of American prisoners of war by suspected Cuban agents. During the course of the hearing, I made several requests for information.

Based on the hearing transcript, I requested the following information and follow up actions:

1. The Committee has documents providing uncorroborated reports that American POWs may have been taken from Vietnam to Cuba. I asked Mr. Destatte to pursue the matter and get back to the Committee with a response.

2. I asked for specific numbers of the F-111 aircraft that were shot down or lost over Vietnam and for the number of F-111 pilots who survived and how many were accounted for. Mr. Desttate offered to provide this information in writing.

3. I asked you to make an effort either directly or through our embassy to secure meetings with former guards at "the Zoo" or others who might be able to identify "Fidel" and other torturers. You offered to "do a tasker and request that [my unit collection agency] immediately begin a pursuit to try to interview those individuals." Can you please inform the committee of all actions taken in this regard to date and the results of those actions?

I would appreciate receiving written responses to the these requests at an early date.

With best wishes for the holidays,

Sincerely,

BENJAMIN A. GILMAN
Chairman

BAG/ccm

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2400 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-2400

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

10 JAN 2000
In reply, refer to:
I-99/016373

The Honorable Benjamin A. Gilman
Chairman, Committee on International Relations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-6128

Dear Chairman Gilman:

Thank you for your December 15, 1999, letter regarding the November 4, 1999, hearing before your Committee on the "Cuban Program." In your letter, you requested that I provide you with written answers to issues raised during that hearing. I am pleased to do so.

Regarding the first issue in your letter, you write that the Committee has documents that provide uncorroborated reports that American POWs may have been taken from Vietnam to Cuba. You asked Mr. Robert J. Destatte, a senior analyst in the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) who testified before your Committee on November 4, to pursue this matter and provide the Committee with a response.

Mr. Destatte and other analysts in the Southeast Asia Division of DPMO's Research and Analysis Directorate have pursued this matter as you requested. However, we have no knowledge of intelligence information that could support a belief that any American POWs were taken from Vietnam to Cuba. If the Committee will provide my office with copies of the uncorroborated reports you cited, we will assess them and provide you and your Committee with the results of our assessment.

You asked that I provide you with information on the history of F-111 losses during the Vietnam War. I have enclosed a copy of my November 22, 1999, letter to the Committee that answers this question.

Regarding your third question, on November 8, 1999, my agency formally requested the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) to initiate every possible effort to identify and interview any individuals that may have been assigned to or may have direct knowledge of the North Vietnamese prisoner of war (POW) camp, nicknamed "the Zoo," in which 19 American POWs were tortured by three individuals they thought could be Cuban nationals. I also asked DIA to locate and exploit any records or other material associated with the camp that may exist that concerned personnel assigned to the camp (cadre), visitors to the camp of any nationality, and the treatment of our POWs. My agency requested DIA to respond to this high priority

requirement as expeditiously as possible. DIA officials have confirmed that efforts are underway to identify and pursue potential sources of information. The officials indicated that they will provide my agency with any information they may acquire from their investigation as soon as it is obtained, and I will forward any such information to the Committee.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify before your Committee and for your continued support of this important humanitarian issue. If I may be of further assistance, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Jones
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
(POW/Missing Personnel Affairs)

Enclosure
As stated