

BARON 52 Incident Summary

5 FEB 73

This summary will detail an incident which should be of interest to you.

The incident and the subsequent information gathered from various sources since the incident date, should graphically detail the deliberate abandonment of at least four (4) U.S. Servicemen in Laos.

This incident would not be described by me as "deliberate" without proper documentation.

I hope this summary will help you and other interested parties come to the same conclusion, and perhaps provide the path to possible remedies.

The event that started this situation was the apparent shoot-down of an EC-47Q aircraft on the 5th of February 1973.

The EC-47Q essentially is a C-47 aircraft which has been altered by the emplacement of a substantial amount of sensitive electronic equipment, so that it can be used for military reconnaissance work.

Among it's functions is the ability to eavesdrop on enemy military communications.

Much of the electronic equipment involved is regarded as SECRET , and crew-member operators had to possess Top Secret Clearance, with special access to compartmentalized information.

(There are Department of Defense "DoD" directives dictating that arrangements be made for the destruction of the aircraft and equipment, rather than risk compromise of same)

The particular EC-47Q with which I am concerned, was based at Ubon Royal Thai Air force Base (RTAFB), Thailand.

It has a crew of eight men - four commissioned officers, primarily responsible for flying and navigating the aircraft.

And four enlisted personnel, responsible for the operation of the electronic equipment aboard.

On February 5, 1973, while on a tactical mission, the EC-47Q and at least some of the crew were shot down over Laos.

Shortly after the shoot-down, another U.S. eavesdropper intercepted enemy communications and ascertained that at least four (4) members of the EC-47Q crew, were alive and had been captured.

This information was known to U.S. Intelligence officials almost immediately following the crash.

However, this information was evidently not revealed to the aircraft's Wing Commander, due to its high secrecy level.

Later, a helicopter lowered a search team to the crash site, and the wreckage was inspected.

This was not a hostile site, and the team was on the ground over forty minutes to complete their survey.

The cargo compartment of the aircraft, as inspected, had melted, though the aircraft remained primarily intact.

This is not common in an uncontrolled landing situation, indicating the possibility that at least one of the flight crew may have stayed aboard to attempt a landing.

Under the nose of the wreck, partial remains of one crewmember were discovered, which were later found to be those of the co-pilot.

Peering into the wreck towards the front, the search team is reported to have seen, but did not reach, two or three additional bodies, still strapped into the seats which are normally occupied by the officers flying the aircraft.

In the rear, where the other crewmembers had been stationed, there was no sign of anyone, and neither they, nor their remains were seen in the area.

This confirmed the information that the men had escaped the crash and been captured.

Eventually, the search party departed, taking with them, the co-pilot's retrievable remains, and, possibly, some other fragments of human remains.

The co-pilot was declared dead, and the other crew members were continued in their Missing Status.

NOTES:

Not one of the 600 Americans lost in Laos, has ever been repatriated.

Not one of the 600 Americans lost in Laos, has ever been negotiated for.

Not one of the 600 Americans lost in Laos, has ever been released.

When Dr. Henry Kissinger negotiated President Nixon's Peace Agreements in Paris in 1973, ending American involvement in the Vietnam War, the Americans lost in Laos were forgotten.

Dr. Kissinger did not negotiate for them, even though several were known to be held as Prisoners-of-War, and some 125 of them were known to have survived their loss incidents.

Furthermore, the Pathet Lao stated on several occasions that they held "tens of tens" of American prisoners.

Thousands of reports have been received by the U.S. government indicating that Americans are still alive, being held in captivity in Southeast Asia.

How much longer can these men wait for their country to bring "peace with honor" by bringing these men home.

Peter Matthes is missing in the Ban Bac area of Laos.

George W. Clarke Jr. is missing in the Saravane Province, Laos.

Gene E. Davis is missing in the vicinity of the Laos border.

Benjamin F. Danielson is missing in the area of Ban Phanop, Laos.

Joseph Christiano is missing in the Ban Bac area of Saravane Province, Laos.

Jefferson M. Donahue is missing in Laos.

Clarence N. Driver is missing in Laos.

Raymond L. Echevarria is missing in Laos.

And the list goes on and on.

Also read the Baron-52 story located [here](#).

Baron 52: Which Makes More Sense?

On the night of February 4th - 5th, 1973, an EC-47Q electronic intercept aircraft, based out of Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base was lost over Laos. It carried an 8 man American crew. Its call sign was Baron 52.

The EC-47Q is a modified transport plane derived from the Douglas DC-3. It is a two engine propeller-driven aircraft. It has a cruising speed of approximately 160 knots, (185 mph), and a maximum speed of approximately 200 knots, (230 mph). At 8,500 feet, it had a range of approximately 1,500 miles.

The EC-47Q patrolled southern Laos, the western borders of South Vietnam and the coastal waters off North Vietnam, picking up radio signals. The missions flown by EC-47Q crews provided valuable information for the planning of tactical fighter or B-52 strikes.

What valuable information was this particular flight, Baron 52, attempting to gather, since the Paris Peace Accords were signed at the end of January, 1973? What tactical fighter strike, what B-52 bombing run was Baron 52 gathering information for?

The Crew of Baron 52 included members of the 361st Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron, (the men who flew the aircraft), and members of the 6994th Security Squadron, US Air Force Security Service, (radio operators and intelligence specialists who sat in the back end ["backenders"] of the aircraft).

Baron 52 Crewmembers were ordered to fly this mission sanitized. No US markings whatsoever. Nothing to identify them as US Military. One of the crewmembers, Peter Cressman, had become so concerned about US violations of the Peace Accords, he began writing a letter to his Congressman about his concerns. But the sanitized flight of 4th - 5th February had interrupted his completion of this letter.

The flight crew had been required to report its position ever thirty minutes; on the hour and the half-hour and they were to report any unusual occurrences, such as mechanical failures, enemy anti-aircraft fire, immediately. They took off from Ubon at approximately 2305 hours on the evening of 4 February 1973. (Eight days after the signing of the Accords).

Timeline Baron 52

- **0010 hours: 5 Feb 73**, Baron 52 speaks with Baron 62, another elint ship, Baron 52 would fly south. Baron 52 also advises a "Spectre" AC-130 gunship, ("Spectre 20"), three F4's and an airborne command-and-control aircraft, ("Moonbeam") of their intentions to head south.
- **0039 hours**: American ground radar station in Thailand records it last radar plot of Baron 52, a few nautical miles west-northwest of Attapu, Laos.
- **0125 hours**: Baron 52 radios that several rounds of anti-aircraft artillery had been fired at Baron 52.

- **0130 hours:** Baron 52 radios "**Ops Normal, All Clear.**"
- **0140 hours:** Baron 52 radios that it has been fired upon by radar controlled AAA guns at a location approximately 60 nautical miles northeast of Attapu, Laos. This is the last position reported by Baron 52.
- **0200 hours:** Baron 52 **fails to make its scheduled report.** Two ground stations and an airborne command-and-control-center aircraft tried unsuccessfully to contact Baron 52 on guard frequencies as well as other radio frequencies.
- **0210 hours:** Search and Rescue is deployed. The three F4's, Spectre 20 and Baron 62 head to assist Moonbeam in SAR efforts. Moonbeam and ground stations conduct visual and communication searches for Baron 52.
- **0600 hours:** Search and Rescue report negative results.

It appears that Baron 52 went down within the 20 minutes that lapsed between the time they reported being fired upon by radar controlled AAA guns, **(0140 hours)**, and the time that it missed its regularly scheduled check-in, **(0200 hours)**.

Baron 52 was not the only thing missing though.

What's Missing From This Picture ?

You will undoubtedly note that Baron 52 acknowledges that it had been fired upon, not once **but twice**. Once at 0125 and again at 0140. The difference between the two reports is the absence of another, "**Ops Normal, All Clear,**" call, similar to the one made at 0130, after the 0125 report of taking AAA fire. Why wasn't Search and Rescue scrambled when they failed to give an "All Clear" call? Why didn't Moonbeam, the three F4's, the Spectre Gunship and Baron 62 start the ball rolling when Baron 52 failed to make an "Ops Normal, All Clear" call? Why would they wait 20 minutes for Baron 52 to make a scheduled check-in, in view of the fact that they had made a second call noting enemy fire?

Why would they wait 20 minutes for an "All Clear"?

If the 2nd engagement by enemy triple A batteries had failed, procedure dictates an "All Clear" call to be made from Baron 52. If procedure, for some strange reason, did not dictate it then common sense would have. Why would Baron 52 call in an "All Clear" signal the first time but not call it in the second time?

Procedure also dictates that in the absence of such a call, an all out effort be immediately launched to ascertain why not, or what happened to prevent the "All Clear" call.

The Department of Defense notes that within 20 minutes of Baron 52's failure to check-in at 0200, Search & Rescue, the three F4's, Spectre 20, Baron 62 and Airborne- Command-and-Control Moonbeam were searching for Baron 52. But it was not within 20 minutes of Baron 52's failure to report in. It was forty minutes after Baron 52 failed to give an "All Clear."

Four days later, on 9 February 1973, a Search and Rescue force lowered three pararescue specialists from the 40th Air Rescue and Recovery Squadron as well as a radioman from the 6994th SS down to the main wreckage. Their mission was to seek out signs of survival, recover any remains and determine if the special electronic

equipment and documents from the back end of the aircraft had been destroyed.

They spent about 15-20 minutes on the ground. Much of that time had been spent in an attempt to recover a set of badly decomposing remains from the front end of the aircraft, placing it in a body bag and rigging it to be lifted by cable to a hovering helicopter. The radioman reported that he had seen three bodies; two in the pilot and co-pilot seats and one in the engineer's compartment behind the pilot's cabin. One of the pararescue specialists thought he saw a fourth body near the engineers compartment. This would account for all the front-enders, one of whose partial remains were recovered at the crash site.

What About The Backend?

The Department of Defense claims that the search team did not enter the fuselage, (backend), of the aircraft because of fear of booby-traps and uncertainty of the structural soundness of the wreckage. In fact, they note that the pararescue specialists contemplated rigging a sling from the SAR helicopter around the fuselage and lifting the wreckage to search for additional bodies, but decided that the wreckage would not be able to take the strain. The Department of Defense states that although the pararescue specialists reported the back-end "clean," what that meant was that the ensuing fire from the crash had consumed everything in the back-end of the aircraft, although the fire appears to have missed the front of the aircraft.

To illustrate the point, DoD notes that there was still five hours worth of fuel on the aircraft when it went down; the only US aircraft shot down that day.

So the 15-20 minutes spent on the ground four days after Baron 52 was shot out of the sky, on a sanitized mission eight days after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, three pararescue specialists had recovered the partial remains of one of the front enders, had assessed the structure of the fuselage, determined that the special electronic equipment and documents had been destroyed and determined that a fire fueled by five hours worth of fuel had consumed everything in the back (fuselage) of the aircraft.

The families of all crewmembers were notified of their loved-ones demise in the service of their nation, were told to hold memorial services for the crewmembers whose remains had not been retrieved and on behalf of the President of the United States and a grateful Nation, may we offer you this American Flag?

In other words, we signed a peace treaty, violated it within eight days and we are not about to re-start this unpopular war, ("grateful nation?"), to go and retrieve their remains especially since we know that the back-end of the aircraft, the area where we kept our sensitive equipment, was clean. Hold memorial services, sit down and shut up!

Enter Jack Anderson

Mary Matejov was cleaning her house in Long Island, New York, five years after the

loss of her son in the Baron 52 crash, listening to one of the morning news programs when she heard reporter Jack Anderson discuss US intelligence on a flight that was shot down eight days after the peace accord had been signed. Knowing that Baron 52 was the only US aircraft shot down that day, Mary paid more attention to the program.

It appears that there were NSA and USAF listening devices in the area where Baron 52 had crashed. Further, there was intelligence from those listening devices whereby enemy transmissions showed that the North Vietnamese were claiming to have captured "Four Air Pirates," or fliers. A second transmission within an hour of the first had the North Vietnamese claiming to be moving these captured fliers North.

Do the math. If the two pararescue specialists saw three bodies in the front end of the aircraft and the third specialist thought he saw a fourth near the engineer's compartment, the back-end of the aircraft was clean; **no equipment, no document, no chutes, no remains, no nothing** and NSA listening devices intercept North Vietnamese radio transmissions claiming to have captured four fliers on that very day and were moving them North, **just who do you suppose it were that had been captured and were being moved North?**

That is **exactly** what the Matejov and Cressman families have tried to find out.

Until Anderson's report, none of the families involved had ever been told about the radio intercepts claiming the capture of 4 pilots or pirates.

It turns out that within five and a half hours of Baron 52's shoot down, in a voice transmission, unclassified portion of that transmission reads, "Group 217 is holding four pilots captive and the Group is requesting orders concerning what to do with them. . ." A follow up transmission noted, "Group 210 has four pirates; they are going from 44 to 93."

Another Incompetent in USG Employ

Between 5 February and May 1973, US Air Force analyst named Jerry Mooney working from Fort Meade MD correlated these two transmissions to Baron 52. The US government did nothing with Mooney's analysis until the Matejov and Cressman families started making noise over Jack Anderson's report. Then it was far easier to trash Mooney than it was to answer the concerns of the families.

The US government employs more incompetents, disgruntles, whacko's and crazies than any other employer on the face of the earth.

Whenever caught off guard, the US Government does everything in its power to portray someone as incompetent, disgruntled, whacko or crazy. Jerry Mooney was to be deemed the former, incompetent. He would join, or soon be joined by, Col. Millard Peck (Incompetent), General Tom Lacey (crazy), who, incidentally, was in charge of one of the US nuclear arsenals, Congressman Billy Hendon (whacko), Colonel Philip Corso (whacko), Garnett "Bill" Bell (disgruntled), Commander Chip Beck, (disgruntled), Dr. Timothy Castle (disgruntled) and the list goes on and on.

Mooney was incompetent, according to the government. He was not a Vietnamese linguist and was unable to reconcile Vietnamese wording meaning "pilot" or "pirate." In Mooney's final analysis of the intercepts, he wrote that the captives were being held by "Group 210" or "Group 210B," never realizing that in the spoken Vietnamese language, "210B" is phonetically similar to "217." The government makes its case against Jerry Mooney by pointing out that "going from 44 to 93" could mean anything. Mooney had determined that these were markers used by the Vietnamese to give their position without referring to maps.

The government claimed that Mooney could not discern whether 44 to 93 indicated movement North. Nor South, East or West for that matter. The government claimed that the markers could have been markers on any stretch of highway, including American highways.

But the government fails to include in their synopsis that it was North Vietnamese who had talked about these markers and that they were in Vietnam, not America, and it just so happened to have coincided with the only shoot down of the day and coincided with the fact that the four back enders who, for whatever reason, were not found dead in the back end of that fuselage.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen your tax dollars were spent on some person coming up with that explanation to show you how very incompetent Jerry Mooney was.

Meanwhile, four American flier's are lost in the bickering over phonetics in an attempt to show that another American is incompetent. But it doesn't end there. Now that our government has spun a tale of incompetence, they have to offer an alternative explanation for the radio intercepts.

Top Gun Comes Out

Robert Destatte is no stranger to POW/MIA family members and activists. He has worked for the Department of Defense for years, spinning the number of POW/MIAs into as many accounted-for Americans as he can. He worked for Defense Intelligence Agencies Special POW/MIA Office clear through to what it has morphed into now, Defense POW Missing Personnel Office, ("DPMO"). He is senior management, although he has no one directly under his "command," if you will.

During the 1991-1993 Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, he gave testimony that enraged the Co-Chair, Robert Smith [R-NH] to the point that Smith has referred Destatte to the Department of Justice to be investigated for possible perjury before Congress.

The former Chairman of the House National Security Committee's Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Robert Dornan [R- CA], has vehemently demanded on several occasions for an investigation of Mr. Destatte.

In April 1997 Dr. Timothy Castle, Chief SE Asia Archival Research, DPMO, was directed by [then] Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense in charge of DPMO,

General James Wold, to write a memorandum voicing Dr. Castle's concerns related to abuse at DPMO.

Dr. Castle wrote a 12½ page memorandum and did not waste any time sugar coating the problem:

"1. PURPOSE: This memo responds to your request for my recommendations on further pursuit of REFNO 2052 as well as my response to the undated REFNO 2052 'Position' and 'Background' materials you have provided. Although these 'Position' and 'Background' papers were written anonymously, I was told that they were submitted by LtCol [Jeannie] Schiff and/or [Robert] Destatte. I will also comment on the materials which were faxed without DPMO approval by Mr. Destatte to Det 2, JTF-FA and the **Vietnamese government** on 13 February [1997]. Although I have been assured by [Tony] Liotta that this **unauthorized conduct** by LtCol Schiff and Mr. Destatte has been disavowed by the DPMO leadership in conversations with CDR JTF-FA, I believe it is important that this continuing extra official relationship ('the old sergeant network') be examined. This is an issue which goes to the core of DPMO's credibility, long-standing efforts by Mr. Destatte (apparently with LtCol Schiff's approval) to **surreptitiously pass information to Hanoi which impedes a fullest accounting of our missing Americans.**" wrote Dr. Castle in the opening paragraph of this 12½ page memorandum.

The portion of Dr. Castle's memorandum appearing in bold (above) was done by me to emphasize what Dr. Castle, who worked side-by-side with Mr. Destatte, felt was wrong. . . not to mention illegal.

Shell Game

In the governments quest to show Jerry Mooney as incompetent, Robert Destatte decided to write a position paper on Baron 52. Claiming that the aircraft was ancient, the parachutes bulky, Destatte writes, "In order for four persons to have successfully bailed out of this aircraft, the aircraft would had to have remained in relatively stable flight for a minute or longer after the emergency occurred - ample time for the crew to have transmitted a distress signal."

Mr. Destatte feels that the crew would have signaled a Mayday or distress call if they had been hit and aloft for more than a minute.

I would venture a guess and state that the backenders would have immediately started preparing the ELINT equipment for jettison, relying on the front enders to radio in the Mayday. After jettisoning the equipment, they would have bailed out of a disabled aircraft relying on SAR to come get them.

The front enders may have been too busy holding the aircraft aloft long enough to provide the backenders with the ability to jettison the equipment. The fact that three of the possible four bodies seen at the crash site were in their assigned areas demonstrates their valiant effort at keeping the aircraft aloft for as long as they could.

They **did** report being fired upon a second time and in the absence of an "All Clear," it should have been assumed that they were in trouble.

But those facts apparently allude Robert Destatte. "This pre-World War II aircraft," Destatte writes, "was not equipped with ejection systems. The electronics specialists in the back of the plane did not wear parachutes while seated at their work stations. The parachutes were too bulky and hindered the men's ability to operate their equipment. In the event of an in-flight emergency that required them to bail out, they first had to don their parachutes. At least one crew member would have been responsible for releasing the door near the rear of the fuselage. Next, one at a time, each man would have to make his way back to the door and jump out. Meanwhile, the pilot and co-pilot would have remained at the controls trying to keep the aircraft in stable flight long enough for the back-enders to get out."

He's right. It sure makes sense. But then, isn't that why the military trains its personnel over and over and over again, so that **should** an emergency arise they do not lose precious time figuring out what to do, but rely on the many, many training exercises that they had completed so that, in fact, **training takes over when under extreme duress**?

Isn't what Destatte describes **exactly** what their training would have had them do?

Wouldn't that explain why there were three, perhaps four, bodies in the forward compartment? **Weren't the bodies there because they stayed in their positions to hold that aircraft aloft long enough for the backenders to do their jobs?**

With respect to the one with the responsibility for unlatching the rear door by the fuselage, how many of you reading this know that it was common practice by flight crews flying low altitude missions to unlatch those doors on the ground before take off? Sure you weren't supposed to, but it did happen and it was overlooked by controllers on the ground.

As far as making one's way to the back of an aircraft that is about to fall from the sky, a minute is an awfully long time to move from point A to point B - and survival. Jumping one at a time from a falling aircraft would not take a minute.

During the Gulf War people donned entire germ warfare protection suits in under a minute with the understanding that taking any longer could mean the difference between life and death. Do you really think that because the chutes were bulky, those men could not get them on **in seconds** if the need arose?

"The four persons mentioned in the [NSA radio intercept] message probably were four Lao irregulars that a PAVN unit picked up in the Highway 8 corridor in Laos and turned over to the 4 4th Provincial Infantry Battalion of Ha Tinh Province," opined Destatte.

And the mystery is solved. The North Vietnamese didn't mean "**pilots**" or "**pirates**," they meant **Lao irregulars** and, of course, the capture of these four Lao irregulars would cause the Vietnamese to **radio their command to request instructions**.

It makes perfect sense.

With this "analysis," Destatte was able to play a shell game upon the families of the missing men and replace their loved ones with Lao irregulars without an iota of evidence indicating that Lao irregulars were even held that day. Certainly, more

credible evidence suggests that the Americans had bailed out and had been captured, but that scenario does not fit in to the government's scheme of things.

And their fate is sealed with the **probable** capture of the 4 Loation irregulars. Not even the definite capture, but probable.

When All Else Fails. . .identification

In January and February 1993, twenty years after the downing of Baron 52, Americans from the JTF-FA, ("Joint Task Force-Full Accounting"), CIL-HI, ("Central Identification Laboratory-Hawaii) and Lao Specialists excavated the Baron 52 crash site. They came up with 23 bone fragments, a half of a tooth and another piece of interesting 'evidence.' Pristine dog tags, resting near the site under a triple canopy jungle for 20 years with nary a sign of wear and tear.

But. . . this was a **sanitized mission**, wasn't it? No US markings. Nothing to identify the aircraft, or the crew, as American.

The half tooth was identified as one belonging to crewman and backender, Sgt. Peter Cressman. The dog tags belonged to Sgt. Joseph Matejov.

With all the teeth that the US government finds, one must wonder if the tooth fairy is on payroll.

CIL-HI could not discern stature, gender nor race from the 23 bone chips so the decision was made to make a "co-mingled remains" finding. This means that the government found enough evidence to claim all eight crewmembers had perished violating the Paris Peace Accords on a sanitized ELINT mission on the evening of 4th - 5th February 1973. And eight more people are accounted for and off the list of unaccounted-for Americans from SE Asia.

The families were forced to accept the identification or else they would not be permitted to have the remains independently examined. In accepting the identification, it caused a rift between some of the family members. But it also does something else. It effectively cuts-off the families from the Casualty Offices and the families are denied permission to look at their loved ones files at the annual League of Families meetings in Washington. The League permits this, but that is yet another story.

Robert Destatte and the spinmasters of Washington can play all the shell games that they want. One day the truth about this and other cases will come to light and then it will be known. I only hope that it happens in my lifetime. I know that I will continue to seek the answers and will continue to press the US government to keep them from sweeping this issue under the rug.

If there is any doubt whatsoever that men were abandoned after the war and may have survived, the **benefit** of that doubt should rest with **them**. . . and not those that would write them off.

Steve Golding,

**TRANSCRIPT
OF
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
LIEUTENANT COLONEL LIONEL H. BLAU
CAPTAIN JOSEPH K. HARDER
CAPTAIN RONALD R. RIBELLIA
CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT RONALD L. SCHOFIELD
INTERVIEWER
Mr Willard R. Ellerson
and
Mr. James E. Pierson
TRANSCRIBED BY:
The Command Historical Office
HQ Electronic Security Command
San Antonio, TX 78243-5000**

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BARON 52 SHOOTDOWN

SIDE 1, TAPE 1, BARON 52

Ellerson: Today is October 24, 1989. In Southeast Asia, we lost six DATA aircraft, sixteen aircrew members, and two personnel on the ground. The very last DATA lost was callsign Baron 52 on the 5th of February 1973. The Command History files are seriously lacking in information relative to this event. The history of Det 3, 6994th Security Squadron for that period, the unit Baron 52 was assigned to, apparently was never written. The Command History at that time was not being written at the DATA level, so there is nothing in the Command History reflecting the loss of this aircraft, or indications of the reporting of the incident. We have here today four members of the Command who were in Southeast Asia and associated with the Baron 52 activity at that time, and our interview will cover what they know about this incident and the loss of the aircraft and its crew. Colonel Blau, would you tell us what you're doing now and what you were doing then in Southeast Asia?

Blau: I'm Lionel Blau (Lionel H., Lt Col, USAF). Right now I'm the Deputy Director of Spaces Programs at HQ ESC. At the time that Baron 52 went down, I was a captain assigned as the Ops Officer at Det 3 of the 6994th located at Ubon, Thailand. I had been assigned since the first part of

January 1973.

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Ellerson: Okay. Chief Schofield

Schofield: Ronald L. Schofield (CMSgt, USAF). I'm assigned at HQ ESC as the Superintendent of Space Programs. At the time I was a TSgt in charge of the training section at Det 3, 6994th. I had been there since 21 August 1969.

Ellerson: And you were the first one on the ground after the aircraft was lost.

Schofield: I was right after the first PJ.

Ellerson: And PJ is? Schofield: Pararescue.

Ellerson: Pararescue. Okay. Captain Harder.

Harder: Joe Harder [Joseph K., Capt, USAF]. At the time, I was assigned... I thought we were at NKP.

Ellerson: Let's get the chronology of the units. Det 3 was at Ubon. It was originally activated at NKP when the 6994th Security Squadron was at Tan Son Nhut, South Vietnam. Later, the 6994th was moved to NKP and Det 3 to Ubon. So at this time, the 6994th was at NKP and Det 3, 6994th was at Ubon.

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Schofield: Yes, sir.

Harder: I was an airborne mission supervisor. I think I was a sergeant at that time.

Ellerson: Out of where?

Harder: NKP.

Ellerson: Okay. Captain Ribellia.

Ribellia: I'm Ron Ribellia [Ronald R. , Capt, USAF]. I was assigned at that time to Det 2, 6994th at Da Nang, South Vietnam. Most of the crewmembers that made up Det 3 at Ubon had come from Da Nang. Det 2 was in the process of closing, but we were still flying under the Vietnamization Program training the Vietnamese Air Force to assume the DATA mission when the U.S. would eventually withdraw from Vietnam.

Ellerson: Okay. You hit on a good point I think that we ought to dwell on before we get into the loss of the aircraft. At this stage in the war, there was a drawdown basically going on in Vietnam. There was the Vietnamization program where we were transitioning the DATA aircraft to the South Vietnamese. There was still activity going on in Laos and Cambodia at this time. And we were still flying active DATA missions against the enemy -- all three of them (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). So

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the period was right after the LINEBACKER B-52 operations in December of '72 where we had large scale bombings in the North and the loss of several B-52s in that activity. So it was during this transition period and drawdown that this occurred. Now, I'd like to read from the history of the '94th to refresh your memories of what the '94th said about this and as a point of departure. And we'll

make this a matter of record.

Loss of Baron 52. On the morning of 5 February 1973 while flying the 11G Area DATA mission, Baron 52 aircraft, SN48636 was lost due to probable enemy AAA. Baron 52 had reported to DATA the presense of 37mm AAA at location XB975710, but called in an ops normal report at 1830Z. At 1900Z, when Baron 52 failed to make its ops normal report, DATA made a normal communications check, but got negative results. A SAR (Search and Rescue) effort was immediately started, as well as a recon effort to help locate the crash site. The crash site was finally identified and located on the 8th of February. A rescue force was sent on the 9th of February to investigate the crash site and recover any bodies and/or classified material that might have been left. TSgt Schofield and Sgt Keen of the 6994th Security Squadron accompanied the rescue force to aid in the recovery of all classified material and equipment that was on board. TSgt Schofield was the third man on the ground, preceded by two pararescue men who established a parameter. It was observed by TSgt Schofield that the main cabin must have suffered intense heat because all of the consoles were completely burnt. Of the remains of the three bodies found at the site, none were (sic) believed to be those of the Security Service crew. The USAFSS crew was listed as MIAs [missing in action] until 23 February 1973 when their status was changed to killed in action in spite of the fact that certain intelligence reports DATA had reported the capture of four fliers in the vicinity of the Baron 52 crash site.

Ellerson: That's the end of the quote. Who wants to start off? The reports show there were 300-500 tanks moving through area 11. The next night, there was a report from the 6994th of up to 11 tanks in the area. So there was heavy tank movement through the area. The reports also show that there was concern about the AAA and possibly some SAMs in the area, which led to a discussion after the shootdown in theater, with

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various theater people, to determine whether the DATA should fly back in there. This was at the end of March. So it appears to have been a fairly high threat area.

Schofield: Yes sir. There were 88s and 57s in there that were radar controlled. They were protecting the route -- 23s and 37s. The 37s could reach up there and get you, but at least you had a fighting chance with those.

Ellerson: What altitude did you fly?

Schofield: 10,000 feet.

Ellerson: That's higher than I normally thought we were flying.

Schofield: We started flying at 3,500. That was optimum altitude but that's when we lost the one aircraft and then they took it up to 10,000.

Ellerson: Was this mission at night? **Schofield:** Yes sir. **Blau:** Our Smoker missions were at night. **Ellerson:** What was a Smoker mission? Describe a Smoker mission.

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Schofield: That one was going in after the tanks. Where they put sensors [Project IGLOO WHITE], they had indications that there was a lot of tank movement on the trail. Our role on that particular mission was to identify and to locate the tanks. The problem with the tanks, though, DATA DATA DATA. But that's what we were out there for.

Blau: We were flying those every night. That was just part of our routine schedule.

Harder: At the time, but it really didn't keep on that long.

Blau: No, it did not. After Baron 52 went down, we didn't fly as many Smokers.

Harder: I didn't know there was ever a doubt that we wouldn't keep flying. I don't think there was ever a doubt in anybody's mind that we'd stay in there.

Ellerson: You're saying that there was a slowdown after....

Harder: I would say it was about a month afterwards.

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Blau: There was a while after that that they determined we shouldn't be flying night missions. We flew daytime missions all the time. We just continued.

Ellerson: What was the configuration of the aircraft? What was the COMBAT CROSS? DATA. Was it the DATA configuration?

Schofield: Yes sir.

Harder: It had to be to get up there DATA

Schofield: Plus, it had a maintenance man on board. Blau: Yes, it did.

Ellerson: So, how many crewmembers did it have?

Schofield: For USAFSS, we had the DATA and the maintenance man. Five. And the frontend had four -- the navigator, pilot, copilot and third pilot.

Ellerson: We only have four names listed -here for USAFSS -- Milton, Name, Name, Matejov.

Schofield: We had a maintenance man on that aircraft.

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Blau: NAME. We only had three operators and one maintenance man on that aircraft, as I recall.

Ellerson: So we agree there were four USAFSS individuals on that aircraft and that's what the '94th history shows. What was the unit designation of the frontend crew 361st TEWS [Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron]? And their complement would normally be the.....

Schofield: Normally the nav, pilot and copilot, but this one also had a third pilot.

Blau: The navigator sat in the back with our crew.

Ellerson: Okay. We've got who was on the plane. You say you had a bird up that night.

Harder: In the adjoining area.

Ellerson: In the adjoining area. According to the reports there was no report from Baron 52.

Schofield: I think they checked into the area and that was their last communications.

Harder: The AMS, in 10 Alfa at that time, heard that they were evading hostile fire.

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Ribellia: Right.. They were under heavy fire, and that was the last transmission. That's what I understood at Da Nang.

Harder: "Had evaded hostile fire," is what they said.

Ribellia: Right. That's right.

Harder: And everybody thought they were in the clear.

Ellerson: That's what the report says they reported to DATA. DATA -- the presense of 37mm AAA.

Blau: But then they called in an ops normal after that.

Ellerson: Called in an ops normal at 1830Z.

Harder: So everybody thought they were in the clear.

Ellerson: And they missed their ops normal at 1900Z; that's when the Search and Rescue started.

Harder: That's when our bird in the next area joined in the effort as much as possible, and tried to raise them up on the radio, but never did.

Blau: They called me when they missed their ops normal. I was in bed and got dressed and came out. We had been calling trying to get our 10 secure comms through to the backenders. We thought perhaps something had happened to just the frontend, but we couldn't get through. That was not typical, not being able to talk to them.

Ellerson: Was this on secure comms or unsecure?

Blau: Secure.

Ellerson: Would they have given their ops normal on secure comms.

Blau: No. Ops normals were frontend. We worked secure in the backend.

Ellerson: There was a thought in my mind as I read the background. Baron was assigned to most DATA at that time. And you were going in the clear..... calling in, in the clear, whenever you had a Baron whatever it was.

Harder: That wasn't strange at all.

Ellerson: No., but I was thinking of the OPSEC aspects. You were in the Vietnamization program at the time. You were training the Vietnamese DATA . You were transitioning aircraft. There was no doubt what the mission of the aircraft was.

Ribellia: They knew exactly what we were doing.

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Schofield: MT

MT

MT

MT

MT

Ellerson: Okay. Good point.

Harder:

Harder: In relation to what you were saying about OPSEC and COMSEC, later on we started changing callsigns daily.

Ellerson: Yes, that was soon after.

Ribellia: I thought it was a result of the Baron 52 shootdown that we decided to change callsigns. I think it was daily changing of callsigns. But the operational procedures then . . . You know, if anybody was listening to us, if they listened to the pilot, especially when we flew out of Ubon, we always took the same heading. We always headed south. When we moved to Ubon, the frontenders were flying the same track. There was a different callsign, but everybody knew we were coming.

Ellerson: According to the history, after you lost contact with the aircraft there were many RF-4 missions and all kinds of Search and Rescue going on, until they took the photograph that we have here on the 7th of February.

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Schofield: Originally, they thought that was an old crash site. There was a lot of controversy over that.

Harder: You guys at the unit took a look at this and noticed that the positions made lumps at the right places.

Blau: Actually what happened is that I had some previous PI experience before my tour over at Ubon, and when they told me that they had some film, I went to the 8th Tac Fighter Wing Intel shop where they had photo interpreting equipment. They identified some C-47 wreckages and I started going through those, one at a time, and I came to this one and identified that as a new crash site. When they said, "No, that's an old crash site," I had them come to check and MT

MT to show that. was a new crash site. MT

MT

Ellerson: On the photo though, it gives the exact geographic coordinates of where that crash site is located.

Blau: On our photo.

Ellerson: On our photo.

Blau: But at the time, that was just a strip of film. We just ran it through.

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Ellerson: But, I'm just establishing for the history, we know exactly from this photograph where the aircraft finally impacted.

Blau: That's correct.

Ellerson: Okay.

Blau: But that was three or four days after the aircraft went down. We did not know exactly where the aircraft had gone down. We knew the general area where it had been, and we were looking in that general area, and had requested and requested that fast FACs go over and take pictures.

Ellerson: Okay.

Blau: Let me go back to that incident because, to me, that's one of the highlights of my career. When they called me, of course, everyone was trying to put together what had happened. We had a Master Sergeant Ralph Jasper. Ralph was there and Jim Luther was there. We were trying to put together another crew to go up for the next flight. We had another flight to leave -- it was a normal flight -- about six o'clock in the morning the briefing time. I hadn't been in the office for more than about 10 minutes until Ralph pulled me aside and said, "Captain, I want to be on that flight. I want to be able to go out and show the young kids that we are not going to be held back if it was shot down. And we'll put together a crew and go out and we'll not only do our job,

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but we'll look for those guys too." Before the actual takeoff time, I think probably 50 percent of the unit was out at the Det. At the time we lived downtown in the Krung Tong Hotel. I don't know how the word got to everybody, but they were there at the unit and I must have been cornered by 15 people that night asking if they could go. One of the interesting things that goes along with this is that Capt Bill Shey, who was the commander of Det 3 at the time, was on leave in Bangkok. His wife had come over and he and his wife were in Bangkok, and Ed Marek [Edward S.] was there filling in as the acting commander.

Ellerson: Now this is at the '94th?

Blau: No, at the Det.

Ellerson: Oh, at the Det? At Ubon.

Blau: Brook Watts [Lt Col, Holbrook M. Watts, 6994th Security Squadron Commander] had sent him down. Since I had only been there for a month, he felt someone needed to be there who . . .

Ellerson: So Ed Marek was there at the scene that night. I didn't realize that.

Blau: So Ed was involved in this also. We sent out a crew that was just a topnotch crew to go back out after that. That was one of the neatest things, to see those guys pull together like that after one of

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their aircraft had disappeared, basically from the face of the earth, as far as they knew. And the folks were just totally professional. As I have told PME classes that I have talked to, one of the toughest decisions I have ever had to make was to send somebody else out there. But at the same time it was one the most rewarding, because I had those guys there who were totally dedicated, the backbone of USAFSS, volunteering to go out and put their life on the line.

Ellerson: Okay. Anything else on that night?

Ribellia: You were at what --- 10 Alpha or 10 Bravo? **Blau:** I think we were at 10 Bravo.

Ellerson: Describe what that means, please.

Ribellia: The area was broken down. If you were flying in area 10, the area was broken down. I think the division was north to south. Ten Alpha was closest and then 10 Bravo . . . If I'm not mistaken, NKP had a bird up.

Schofield: Yes, we did.

Ribellia: That other USAFSS mission deviated from the mission track and went on a SAR, and they kept that bird up until it was virtually on fumes coming in, from my understanding.

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Schofield: That's correct.

Ribellia: They kept it up as long as they could. So the tasking had changed DATA

Ellerson: So the other one from NKP that was airborne deviated to help try to locate the Baron 52 aircraft.

Ribellia: Well, for a good portion. I know that the missions that flew out of Ubon, and the missions that flew out of NKP and from Da Nang were pretty much, even though we were tasked to go in certain areas, but I know we were on our own Guard Freq hoping that one of our guys might come up some way or another. But almost all of the missions that were in the immediate area, except for the ones that flew south, I think NKP had most of those, if we thought we were in radio distance we went on SAR.

Ellerson: How many missions did we have up simultaneously at night.

Blau: Two.

Schofield: That's the most we ever had up. Blau: Two is what I remember.

Ribellia: In that particular area. Because I know we still had some . . .

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Schofield: When all the units were up, we had more than that.

Ribellia: Oh., yes. We sent up Smokers at night too, out of Da Nang, but not during that particular timeframe.

Ellerson: Okay. We've established it was a high threat area; tanks moving through the area, and lost contact after 1830. So, sometime between 1830 and 1900, we had two missions up and one got shot down or was lost somehow. And then after we located it....

Blau: One of the points that I always like to point out on these pictures is that this does not show the way the aircraft came into the crash site. When you look at the film, the footage that I looked at, it was very obvious that the aircraft had hit up on top of the hill and came directly in and impacted upside down. The wings were knocked off, and part of the aircraft, it looked to me like a tail section, was up on the hill.

Ellerson: How far away up on the hill?

Blau: Oh, I don't know -- 400 hundred yards. Something like that.

Ellerson: A fair distance. The aircraft must have been moving fairly fast.

Blau: The thing that I think is important is that the aircraft nose was still on a direct line with that hill.

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TAPE 1, SIDE 2, BARON 52

Blau: The reason that I think it's important to note where that tail section was, or where that piece of fuselage was and where it hit up on the hill, and its relative

bearing with the nose of the aircraft, is that in determining that the individuals were KIA, Col Francis Humphries, who was 8th Tac Fighter Wing Commander at Ubon at the time, the main thing that he said would cause him to say they were KIA was that if the aircraft was spinning no one could get out of the aircraft. I pointed out to him that that aircraft hit straight ahead. It was not spinning as far as I could tell. He totally disregarded that, as well as any other DATA messages.

Ellerson: You mean an airborne evacuation as opposed to on the ground, because when it ended up it ended up upside down, so any survivors would have had to bailout. Is that a correct assumption.

Schofield: Absolutely, sir, and there was an intel report

Ellerson: Okay, but before we get into the intel report, tell us . . . you came in with the Search and Rescue'. You and one other individual.

Schofield: Yes, sir, Sergeant Keen (_____ need first name) who was Bravo maintenance.

Ellerson: What did you find?

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Schofield: We found the aircraft was on its back. We knew it had a full fuel load which accounts for the intensity of fire. All I was there for was to make sure there was no classified still available. When we got there, one of the PJs set up a parameter, and the other one and myself were looking for bodies. We only found three bodies and that was the pilot, the copilot and the third pilot. The backend, even the equipment was burned, and the Colonel (Blau) and I have talked about it. These aircraft flew with the doors on. If that aircraft had crashed with the door on, there would have been a little bit of it left at the top. There was absolutely nothing. It was gone. It looked like it had been kicked off.

Ellerson: Kicked off; You mean ejected? The door had been ejected?

Schofield: Pulled the handle and got rid of it and people bailed out. Because there was about 12 to 14 inches of the aircraft left and where the door was, the top of the door was open. The top of it was not there. *But everything else had burned. And also the frontend -- nomex flight suits are good, I learned that -- you could recognize the pilot, copilot and third pilot, and there should have been some remains of the backenders in the fire, but there wasn't anything.*

Ellerson: Wasn't the aircraft totally flattened.

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Schofield: No sir, it was upside down. But, we found the pilot and copilot right where they should have been, and the third pilot in front of the firewall. There was an area in there where the radios were on one side, and the distribution panel on the other side, and there was a little table in there.

Ellerson: Now, wasn't the backend flat down to the ground when you walked in there?

Schofield: The whole bottom was burned off. The aircraft was inverted and the

whole bottom was off. *The three bodies were right where they should have been. There should have 'been some remains in the backend, but there was absolutely nothing.*

Ellerson: It was upside down. Wasn't the floor on top of those things?

Schofield: It was gone.

Ellerson: It was gone. So it was all burned out.

Schofield: The top of the aircraft was all there was left.

Ellerson: The bottom of the aircraft, which was upside down, was all gone and everything was burned down. **There's no possibility in your mind that they could have been cremated?**

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Schofield: I thought so originally. I've had this on my mind for a long time because, whatever I said, had a direct impact on the decisions made. No, I've given it a lot of thought and I've talked to the Colonel (Blau) about that, and the absence of the top of the door, the intel report about the four fliers, shock, which indicates that they'd been suffering from burns, which they probably would have. We had another interesting phenomenon. DATA

DATA

DATA I brought this up and they said, "No, that's happened before." But I had five years in Southeast Asia, 4 1/2 on flying status, and never have I seen them just DATA They were very cautious because they could screw up pretty bad. And they were very amateurish out there. They had very little training and whenever they DATA DATA DATA And I felt in my own mind that they had, in fact, been captured and had been interrogated.

Blau: Let me talk about the crew that was there. Matejov and NAME had been flying for a long time. Matejov had been a stan-evaler and I think NAME was too. One of the typical things on a smoker, if you were being shot at, you had on your parachute harness and, if they had chest packs, they had the chest packs sitting right next to them and they slapped them on. And I know for a fact that those guys could slap the chest packs on and be out the door in 1 1/2 minutes, because we

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practiced that evacuation and they had more than ample time to get out a door. I've had a hard time accepting that they were killed in a crash, because I think that those guys would have been out long before they would have gone down with the aircraft.

Schofield: We really couldn't spend that much time on the ground. We had some intruders, or whatever you want to call them, in the area. We called in some A-7s. They had just switched from the A-1 Spads to the A-7s and they made some passes, but nothing happened. And then we got an IFE (in-flight emergency) on the chopper that we were on, so we made the decision -- we had the body bags with us -- to try to recover one of the bodies. The one that was in the best position was the third pilot. And when we tried to retrieve the body, it separated at the waist and we were only able to bring up the upper torso. I carried the body bag up on the jungle penetrator into the helicopter. We

probably should have spent some more time there, but because of the area, they didn't want to put us back in.

Ellerson: Going back to our earlier discussion, there were four enlisted and the navigator in the backend.

Blau: That's correct.

Ellerson: So there were five unaccounted for in the backend. One officer and the four enlisted. I'm raising that because I've read the intelligence reports and I just want to make sure. They talked about four.

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Schofield: There was nothing in the backend. It was totally burned out. There would have been something. After seeing the state of those Nomexes, they are good and they did protect the skin underneath the Nomexes. So there should have been some remains in the backend and they should have been identifiable, but there was nothing.

Ellerson: Okay. Anything else we need to talk about before we move into the intelligence reports? Let me back up before we go any further. DATA in December 1972, issued a fairly scathing report about the lack of maintenance. I guess DATA had complained about lack of DATA mission fulfillment. There were strong implications about aircraft maintenance problems.

Schofield: Yes sir, there were. As a matter of fact, we lost one aircraft. What happened was they pulled in maintenance people who had recip engine experience at the beginning, of their career, but had been in jets since then. So, yes we did experience some problems, especially with the actuator, with the flaps, where one part was being installed backwards and it caused some problems. It caused some hydraulic leaks.

Ellerson: There was a serious concern, and then all of a sudden, it picked up fairly well. I'm not saying there was any lack of diligence on anybody's part. In April 1973, on 304 with the maxi, super goon, one of Marek's reports said he didn't want it to go to Ubon because of overloading. They put seven aircraft on the field, and they had maintenance difficulties down there.

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Schofield: Ubon was the one that primarily had the maintenance problems.

Ellerson: I'm trying to raise every spectre on whether it was shot down or might have ditched because Baron 53 had an emergency at Pleiku two months later, according to the histories. The point I'm trying to make here is: could it have been maintenance problems that caused it to go down?

Blau: If it had been maintenance difficulties, those guys would not have stayed in the aircraft and there would have been maydays.

Schofield: Also, on those four-seaters, they took the the normal engine was a R1830, which is a pretty small engine, but on the four-seaters, they took the R2004D off the DC-6, which is a big engine, and for this aircraft that was a lot of power. I've come in with one engine out and the other one coughing, and it brought us home, and that was on a four-seater; so those aircrafts were awfully forgiving.

Ellerson: On the ground, also, there was some speculation, on the part of the pararescue person, that there were holes from antiaircraft in the body.

Schofield: Yes sir.

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Ellerson: That was pretty hard to tell, I imagine, from the aircraft having pancaked down and then flipped over 400 yards later.

Schofield: He was more of an expert on it than I was, but that's what he said it looked like.

Ellerson: Do you know if there was any effort made to go back to get the other two bodies?

Schofield: I've asked that question sir.

Ellerson: And you don't know of any?

Blau: From what I understand, there was never anyone else who went into that crash site.

Schofield: No sir.

Blau: I talked to Mr. AN in the POW/MIA office at the Pentagon several years ago about that particular aircraft, and he told me nobody else had gone in, although they have made that a priority site to go back and look again, but as far as I know nobody else has ever gone back in.

Schofield: And I provided all the information to AN too.

Ellerson: And who was he?

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Schofield: AN He was involved with the MIAs in Southeast Asia.

Ellerson: The recovery and/or accounting for?

Blau: Yes. He worked at the Pentagon and then moved over to DIA.

Ellerson: Okay, then the next series of actions I guess was.... and I've had a very hard time reading what was thermofaxed, I guess at that time, and sat at the computer for a couple of days, being an old 202, and came up with what I thought it said. It looks like an informal request on 12 February (1973) requesting information concerning the shootdown of Baron 52 on 4 February [1973], and it says why they asked the question. It appears to be quoting a message DATA response as to what their interpretation of that intelligence report was, about four fliers, and I think I've got, quite a bit of it out, and I'll have to work on this later because it's lost to history. Whose most familiar with this?

Schofield: All we've got is what we've read. *But where the fliers were picked up would follow with the wind direction and everything they plotted out.- and it was about the right area where they were captured.*

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Ellerson: Yes, it indicates that, from the apparent flight profile at the time. It's hard to read, but I think it says, 55 kilometers away, prevailing winds would have caused them to be floating in that area, and that there were four fliers captured and being transported in ground transport.

Schofield: Yes sir, and they were suffering from shock, or being treated for shock, or something like that.

Ellerson: Okay. I couldn't find that in this highly garbled message.

Schofield: That was one of the things that came out, that they were in shock or being treated for shock.

Ellerson: But the sense of that DATA was that four fliers were captured, and it was postulated that fliers meant enlisted men, and DATA said fliers generally can be a generic term. They meant whole B-52 crews at one time, so you could have enlisted. So, they tend to shoot down the supposition that these were enlisted men, DATA. The fact that fliers might have been transported from Laos for repatriation at that time was implied, because of the POW release that was going to take place. I pulled as much as I could out of there.

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Schofield: We went through that too, and we looked at when the B-52 was shot down. That happened in December, and this was in February, and these people were supposedly captured shortly after they parachuted into the area. And based on everything, the prevailing winds at that time, where the aircraft was supposedly located and everything, I guess, maybe, we were trying to convince ourselves that's who they were, but it seemed awfully logical to us. Anyway, the B-52 carries more than four.

Ellerson: I believe what DATA position was....

Ribellia: In reference to pilots, they would refer to officers as pilots, and anytime they referred to enlisted types, it was fliers, remember seeing that

Ellerson: Okay, I was trying to figure out.... DATA from the way they were describing this. From some special source, I take it.

Ribellia: I never knew the source.

Ellerson: It might have been one of the type of operations that were going on in the area at that time. Ribellia: The point of that DATA was that they referred to fliers, versus in the past, they always used pilots when referring to officers.

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Ellerson: That's not what DATA appears to be saying in the message. The way I've been able to decipher it . . .

Blau: That's correct. DATA came back and said the term fliers could be used interchangeably, but it could mean that it was backenders. Although, what we had seen before, and what we had seen and heard in POW training and things like that, it indicated that they had talked about pilots. And even the backend crewmembers, they would often call pilots, because they just didn't know the difference between wings and what they meant.

Ellerson: If we assume that this was part of the crew, there would have been one navigator and three enlisted.

Harder: Normally, you didn't fly with your wings anyhow..

Ellerson: There were five missing and four were in the referenced DATA Blau: That is correct. This DATA was going back and forth at the time the determination of whether they were MIA or KIA was being made. When I found out that Colonel Humphries was being contacted and they were

asking him the question, "Should these guys be declared KIA or MIA?" I hustled down and asked for a sanitized version.

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Ellerson: There's a message from Brook Watts coming back to the Command, talking about contact from one airborne unit from an individual that formerly had DATA clearance, that wanted to know if there was any DATA involved. That probably was a result of your actions.

Blau: Yes, and I went in and simply told the Colonel, "Please do not make that decision yet, until we can get straighted out what this DATA is about." And at that time, he said, "No. If those guys were in the C-47, I've flown in them, I know what happens. If they start spinning, they will never get out." *I said, "Sir, there's no indication that it was spinning." And he said, "That's the decision. They are KIA."*

Ellerson: I don't know what else to say. It's still up in the air.

Schofield: Yes it is, and there have been indications with the 52.

Blau: There was a photo that showed up in the Jack Anderson column, that showed MT a POW area, and it appeared that next to the POW area, in an open field, a 52 was stamped out in the grass like someone had walked it. Ellerson: Couldn't that have been a B-52?

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Blau: Normally you would not go with that, DATA DATA Ellerson: Is there anything else we should discuss?

Ribellia: Just the personalities that I knew, because I lived with them at Da Nang before they went over to Ubon. I knew Matejov when we were stationed at Misawa prior to going to Southeast Asia. And, I just have to believe, knowing those people, that if that airplane was going down, I just know those guys would get out and survive.

Schofield: Especially from that altitude.

Blau: If they had been hit in the front end, like it indicates they were, if they took 37mm up in the front end, the guys in the backend had the equipment in front of them. They probably would have been protected from some of that. As I have sat back and tried to analyze this, I think the guys in the backend would have had time to get out. I've gone through this in my sleep, awake, it haunted me for quite a while.

Ellerson: If they were transporting fliers, whatever grade they were, from -Laos for consolidation with other fliers or prisoners of war for repatriation soon thereafter, I would think any debrief of POWs as to where they came from -- I'm sure they were all debriefed -- there would be substantiating collateral that would refute the repatriation theory

DATA

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Blau: NAME told me that the DATA that he had been able to find, indicated that the DATA DATA, actually was about fliers over in Vietnam along the coast that were going North, but that didn't hold water as far as I was concerned. But that's what he said that DATA meant.

Ellerson: The DATA the four fliers DATA coordinates and different routes that they were taking, so

there were geographic coordinates DATA that would have placed them at the location.

TAPE 2, SIDE 1, BARON 52

Ellerson: You were just bringing up whether the areas were hot or not.

Harder: We had been getting reports that tanks were moving down all the time, but we had been flying those missions and it had become the norm, and we were getting very little.

Schofield: But remember at the end of 2 op where they had the guns that were overlapping each other -- there were some 88s and 57s out there -- and we heard that some of them were radar controlled.

Harder: We had always wondered why all of a sudden these guys down on the ground had decided to react that night to., that mi mission. Was it a particular target to them that night?

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Blau: That night there were some 130s flying also. There were gunships up there and we were flying in the same general area that they were.

Schofield: Remember the 2 op though, there was nothing but guns on both sides.

Harder: It was strange. We had been receiving reports of tanks and that's why we were up there on those missions, and we'd never gotten hardly anything. And that might have been the reason why they stopped flying, because we never got that much.

Ellerson: But the '94th history does show that the very next mission had, I believe, close to 10 tanks, and there was a meeting at the highest levels to determine whether you should get close air support flying in there. Was it worth doing that?

Harder: Alone, unarmed and afraid. That's what it said on our shirts.

Ellerson: Is that what it said on your shirts?

Blau: Alone, unarmed and afraid.

Schofield: But we were told by the highest authority that we were not afraid, so we changed it to unafraid.

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Ellerson: Is there anything else that you want to offer on the Baron 52 incident.

Blau: From a personality standpoint, as a result of Baron 52 going down, we had two people who said that they had a fear of flying and did not fly anymore.

Ellerson: How large was Det 3?

Blau: We were just cranking up at the time, so we probably had about 35 to 40 people.

Ellerson: And six aircraft? Is that what it was?

Blau: That was later on.

Ribellia: They were split Det 2 and Det 3 had split their resources. We were phasing down in Da Nang and they were building up in Ubon.

Blau: I don't remember the date that you guys came on board.

Ribellia: We left Vietnam on 27 February to go to Ubon. Blau: We had some aircraft still at Da Nang and some at Ubon.

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Harder: I think that was one of the reasons for the increase of missions that we discussed earlier. Remember, a bird would be broken and you were cancelled out. But, I remember during this timeframe, if we found a broken bird, we'd go to another one and try it out. We'd go through three planes to try to fly a mission because we had more assets after these guys moved out of Nam.

Blau: That's what it was.

Harder: I think that's why you saw a large increase in mission accomplishment.

Ellerson: Okay. I think we've done about as much as we can on Baron 52. I had one other question and we'll make it a separate one if we can. In researching this, I found a message from DATA DATA DATA

Schofield: Yes sir, I was involved.

Ellerson: Okay. I think it's a very good precedent because of the DATA Can you enlighten us on that?

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Schofield: It was 304 -- aircraft 304 -- the Super Goon. The bird was put in there to go after the acquisition radars on SAM sites and that's exactly what we did. But it had the range DATA DATA DATA and what they were trying to do was track the route that the smugglers were using. I flew that one.

Ellerson: And you were able to position the ship? Do you know what area it flew?

Schofield: We were flying in the Gulf of Siam.

Ellerson: So on 304, the Super Goon, with the Maxi, you flew that mission and were able to DATA position the ship with that DATA aboard. Anything else, Jim.

Pierson: I'm just wondering what happened to the Det 3 history for that period. We have histories for all other periods.

Ribellia: When we closed up Ubon, we were directed by USAFSS to send all of our records, if I'm not mistaken, to someplace in St Louis. Colonel Blau had gone PCS and there was just a handful of us left at Ubon to close up the unit, but Security Service said to package it all up and send it to a center in St Louis that keeps all records.

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Schofield: Well, when I was here before, I went out to Medina and they had a whole bunch of records from that period, and I went through them. Most of them were training documentation for our programs, stan/eval programs, and that sort of thing. But, as far as the classified, it should have been sent back here.

Ribellia: Or to the Pacific Security Region.

Ellerson: One of the problems I had in researching, other than the fact that the Det's history was not

there, we were phasing out the Region at that time. The Pacific Security Region was being deactivated because of the Central Security Service cuts at that time, and so there was no history for PSR. And all of the messages on the shutdown were addressed to DOR, but there was nothing from DOR in the Command History because we weren't writing an DATA history at that time; only DATA and some special project histories. So we are sadly lacking on information.

Schofield: Well, histories weren't emphasized during that period. It depended upon who the commander was.

Blau: We were in a war situation. We were trying to do the mission and the paperwork followed, if at all.. We had to do a job and we went out and did it, and if we were able to do the paperwork later, it happened. Some careers were affected that way because the Stan/Eval team would come through or an IG Team would come through and they'd just rip you a new one, but that was one of the facts of you were doing your job, quite often you didn't get the paperwork done.

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Ribellia: Not only that, we were in a drawdown. When we were in Thailand, we were directed to drawdown. So as we were drawing down and people were PCSing, you had a lesser amount of bodies to do the paperwork. So you didn't have the personnel to support all of the Command's requirements, and history was not the highest priority.. **Blau:** The whole, DATA program was an exciting, very rewarding job.

Harder: Instant job satisfaction.

Blau: That's right. Instant job satisfaction.

Schofield: Instant feedback.

Blau: You'd go in and start doing a mission. and get a good DATA position and call it in to the ABCCC or to whoever was there. Then pretty soon, you'd hear on Guard to clear a certain area and we'd back away and watch as the fighters came in and hit the site.

Schofield: We had fast movers that we called the data to, we had slow movers, we had the ground FACs, we had different areas that we called the data down to, and DATA that was probably the first instance where we DATA and passed the data down. We were flying in an area up near the triborder. They had sent birds over there and they had come back with maybe DATA . and so they picked me to head up a crew, and we went up there DATA

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DATA, that had kicked the dickens out of the Army, so I called down to the Army unit and said, "hey, you remember the guy that messed up your day about a week ago." They said, "Yes." And I said, "How would you like to get him?" They said, "You bet." So I gave them the UTM coordinates and they went in and just did a number on them. That was unauthorized, but that was the kind of thing we did and it made your day, and it didn't take a 44 automatic to do it. It was a lot of fun.

Ellerson: You do a lot of things that you need to do.

Schofield: Yes sir, you sure do.

Ellerson: And that's what General Larson said. Anybody that's a good commander or good NCO or somebody that's good in their work, takes chances. They'll get in trouble occasionally, but most of the time they'll be an excellent leader. And that's what you all did.

Schofield: We had the cream of the crop crews down there.

Blau: We really did. The guys. that were flying were absolutely super.

Schofield: Our backenders were totally professional all the way through, but the frontenders got less than professional near the end. The impact of what was going on back home had a devastating effect on

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their morale. They would weather abort with a cloud 500 miles from the area. Anything not to put the aircraft up. There was really a lot of frustration there at the end for our people, because they tried to fly the mission, but just did not have the support of the frontenders.

Ellerson: That might be part of what the DATA was talking about starting late in December 1972.

Blau: That seemed to be coming on more toward the end of '73. The first part of '73, we still had a lot of majors and old lieutenant colonels who were flying the goons, and those guys were so smooth they'd land those airplanes and you wouldn't even know you were on the ground. And you'd get a lieutenant or a young captain and "splat." You'd see that airplane going all-over the runway when it came down.

Ribellia: After August 15, 1973, nobody else was flying, but we were out there and the airways were totally quiet. It was an erie feeling.

Blau: On the 15th of August, Colonel Humphries came into Ubon flying his F-4. He was the last fighter to come out of Vietnam. He had hung on a tank up there so he would be the last one out. And just as he came in and they were taking pictures, we were taking off on another mission going over Vietnam.

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Ribellia: That was an erie feeling. And the younger frontenders that came in after that couldn't relate to the battle experience, the war experience and why the aircraft had to be there. why we wanted to be there. One of problems was that we went MT from the backend. Of course, a lot of it was classified. We'd either go DATA DATA. When the F-4s were out there doing there bomb runs, and it was because of the information we gave them, or the OV-10s, or FACs were doing their thing and calling in additional air-to-ground support, the younger pilots didn't see that, so the mission didn't have that much meaning to them. Their butts were the only thing they were concerned with.

Schofield: Plus it was an unpopular war at that time. There were a lot of demonstrations back here in the States. It was really discouraging out there trying to keep going. It was the frontenders. Primarily, it was the real young ones that had just come over there.

Blau: We really didn't have much problem with the backenders, that I recall, even when we were flying the Cambodian missions. the Sleeper missions. We really didn't have a whole lot to do except fly down and see what was there and come back.

Ellerson: I think we should draw this to a close. Thank you all very much.

5Feb73 9Feb73 Baron 52 SAR

USAF Oral History Interview

Documents Relating to the Indochina Wars
USAF Oral History Interview
The Baron 52 Shootdown

TRANSCRIPT
OF
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
LIEUTENANT COLONEL LIONEL H. BLAU
CAPTAIN JOSEPH K. HARDER
CAPTAIN RONALD R. RIBELLIA
CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT RONALD L. SCHOFIELD
INTERVIEWER
Mr Willard R. Ellerson
and
Mr. James E. Pierson
TRANSCRIBED BY:
The Command Historical Office
HQ Electronic Security Command
San Antonio, TX 78243-5000
BARON 52 SHOOTDOWN

SIDE 1, TAPE 1, BARON 52

Ellerson: Today is October 24, 1989. In Southeast Asia, we lost six DATA aircraft, sixteen aircrew members, and two personnel on the ground. The very last DATA lost was callsign Baron 52 on the 5th of February 1973. The Command History files are seriously lacking in information relative to this event. The history of Det 3, 6994th Security Squadron for that period, the unit Baron 52 was assigned to, apparently was never written. The Command History at that time was not being written at the DATA level, so there is nothing in the Command History reflecting the loss of this aircraft, or indications of the reporting of the incident. We have here today four members of the Command who were in Southeast Asia and associated with the Baron 52 activity at that time,

and our interview will cover what they know about this incident and the loss of the aircraft and its crew. Colonel Blau, would you tell us what you're doing now and what you were doing then in Southeast Asia?

Blau: I'm Lionel Blau (Lionel H., Lt Col, USAF). Right now I'm the Deputy Director of Spaces Programs at HQ ESC. At the time that Baron 52 went down, I was a captain assigned as the Ops Officer at Det 3 of the 6994th located at Ubon, Thailand. I had been assigned since the first part of January 1973.

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Ellerson: Okay. Chief Schofield.

Schofield: Ronald L. Schofield (CMSgt, USAF). I'm assigned at HQ ESC as the Superintendent of Space Programs. At the time I was a TSgt in charge of the training section at Det 3, 6994th. I had been there since 21 August 1969.

Ellerson: And you were the first one on the ground after the aircraft was lost.

Schofield: I was right after the first PJ.

Ellerson: And PJ is?

Schofield: Pararescue.

Ellerson: Pararescue. Okay. Captain Harder.

Harder: Joe Harder [Joseph K., Capt, USAF]. At the time, I was assigned... I thought we were at NKP.

Ellerson: Let's get the chronology of the units. Det 3 was at Ubon. It was originally activated at NKP when the 6994th Security Squadron was at Tan Son Nhut, South Vietnam. Later, the 6994th was moved to NKP and Det 3 to Ubon. So at this time, the 6994th was at NKP and Det 3, 6994th was at Ubon.

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Schofield: Yes, sir.

Harder: I was an airborne mission supervisor. I think I was a sergeant at that time.

Ellerson: Out of where?

Harder: NKP.

Ellerson: Okay. Captain Ribellia.

Ribellia: I'm Ron Ribellia [Ronald R. , Capt, USAF], I was assigned at that

time to Det 2, 6994th at Da Nang, South Vietnam. Most of the crewmembers that made up Det 3 at Ubon had come from Da Nang. Det 2 was in the process of closing, but we were still flying under the Vietnamization Program training the Vietnamese Air Force to assume the DATA mission when the U.S. would eventually withdraw from Vietnam.

Ellerson: Okay. You hit on a good point I think that we ought to dwell on before we get into the loss of the aircraft. At this stage in the war, there was a drawdown basically going on in Vietnam. There was the Vietnamization program where we were transitioning the DATA aircraft to the South Vietnamese. There was still activity going on in Laos and Cambodia at this time. And we were still flying active DATA missions against the enemy -- all three of them (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). So

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the period was right after the LINEBACKER B-52 operations in December of '72 where we had large scale bombings in the North and the loss of several B-52s in that activity. So it was during this transition period and drawdown that this occurred. Now, I'd like to read from the history of the '94th to refresh your memories of what the '94th said about this and as a point of departure. And we'll make this a matter of record.

Loss of Baron 52. On the morning of 5 February 1973 while flying the 11G Area DATA mission, Baron 52 aircraft, SN48636 was lost due to probable enemy AAA. Baron 52 had reported to

DATA

the presense of 37mm AAA at location XB975710, but called in an ops normal report at 1830Z. At 1900Z, when Baron 52 failed to make its ops normal report, DATA made a normal communications check, but got negative results. A SAR (Search and Rescue) effort was immediately started, as well as a recon effort to help locate the crash site. The crash site was finally identified and located on the 8th of February. A rescue force was sent on the 9th of February to investigate the crash site and recover any bodies and/or classified material that might have been left. TSgt Schofield and Sgt Keen of the 6994th Security

Squadron accompanied the rescue force to aid in the recovery of all classified material and equipment that was on board. TSgt Schofield was the third man on the ground, preceded by two pararescue men who established a parameter. It was observed by TSgt Schofield that the main cabin must have suffered intense heat because all of the consoles were completely burnt . Of the remains of the three bodies found at the site, none were (sic) believed to be those of the Security Service crew. The USAFSS crew was listed as MIAs [missing in action] until 23 February 1973 when their status was changed to killed in action in spite of the fact that certain intelligence reports DATA had reported the capture of four fliers in the vicinity of the Baron 52 crash site.

Ellerson: That's the end of the quote. Who wants to start off? The reports show there were 300-500 tanks moving through area 11. The next night, there was a report from the 6994th of up to 11 tanks in the area. So there was heavy tank movement through the area. The reports also show that there was concern about the AAA and possibly some SAMs in the area, which led to a discussion after the shutdown in theater, with

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various theater people, to determine whether the DATA should fly back in there. This was at the end of March. So it appears to have been a fairly high threat area.

Schofield: Yes sir. There were 88s and 57s in there that were radar controlled. They were protecting the route -- 23s and 37s. The 37s could reach up there and get you, but at least you had a fighting chance with those.

Ellerson: What altitude did you fly?

Schofield: 10,000 feet.

Ellerson: That's higher than I normally thought we were flying.

Schofield: We started flying at 3,500. That was optimum altitude but that's when we lost the one aircraft and then they took it up to 10,000.

Ellerson: Was this mission at night?

Schofield: Yes sir.

Blau: Our Smoker missions were at night.

Ellerson: What was a Smoker mission? Describe a Smoker mission.

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Schofield: That one was going in after the tanks. Where they put sensors [Project IGLOO WHITE], they had indications that there was a lot of tank movement on the trail. Our role on that particular mission was to identify and to locate the tanks. The problem with the tanks, though, DATA

DATA

DATA

DATA . But that's what we were out there for.

Blau: We were flying those every night. That was just part of our routine schedule.

Harder: At the time, but it really didn't keep on that long.

Blau: No, it did not. After Baron 52 went down, we didn't fly as many Smokers.

Harder: I didn't know there was ever a doubt that we wouldn't keep flying. I don't think there was ever a doubt in anybody's mind that we'd stay in there.

Ellerson: You're saying that there was a slowdown after....

Harder: I would say it was about a month afterwards.

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Blau: There was a while after that that they determined we shouldn't be flying night missions. We flew daytime missions all the time. We just continued.

Ellerson: What was the configuration of the aircraft? What was the COMBAT CROSS?

DATA . Was it the DATA configuration?

Schofield: Yes sir.

Harder: It had to be to get up there DATA

Schofield: Plus, it had a maintenance man on board.

Blau: Yes, it did.

Ellerson: So, how many crewmembers did it have?

Schofield: For USAFSS, we had the DATA and the maintenance man. Five. And the frontend had four -- the navigator, pilot, copilot and third pilot.

Ellerson: We only have four names listed -here for USAFSS -- Milton, Name, Name, Matejov.

Schofield: We had a maintenance man on that aircraft.

Blau: NAME. We only had three operators and one maintenance man on that aircraft, as I recall.

Ellerson: So we agree there were four USAFSS individuals on that aircraft and that's what the '94th history shows. What was the unit designation of the frontend crew 361st TEWS [Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron]? And their complement would normally be the.....

Schofield: Normally the nav, pilot and copilot, but this one also had a third pilot.

Blau: The navigator sat in the back with our crew.

Ellerson: Okay. We've got who was on the plane. You say you had a bird up that night.

Harder: In the adjoining area.

Ellerson: In the adjoining area. According to the reports there was no report from Baron 52.

Schofield: I think they checked into the area and that was their last communications.

Harder: The AMS, in 10 Alfa at that time, heard that they were evading hostile fire.

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Ribellia: Right.. They were under heavy fire, and that was the last transmission. That's what I understood at Da Nang.

Harder: "Had evaded hostile fire," is what they said.

Ribellia: Right. That's right.

Harder: And everybody thought they were in the clear.

Ellerson: That's what the report says they reported to DATA .

DATA -- the presense of 37mm AAA.

Blau: But then they called in an ops normal after that.

Ellerson: Called in an ops normal at 1830Z.

Harder: So everybody thought they were in the clear.

Ellerson: And they missed their ops normal at 1900Z; that's when the Search and

Rescue started.

Harder: That's when our bird in the next area joined in the effort as much as possible, and tried to raise them up on the radio, but never did.

Blau: They called me when they missed their ops normal. I was in bed and got dressed and came out. We had been calling trying to get our

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secure comms through to the backenders. We thought perhaps something had happened to just the frontend, but we couldn't get through. That was not typical, not being able to talk to them.

Ellerson: Was this on secure comms or unsecure?

Blau: Secure.

Ellerson: Would they have given their ops normal on secure comms.

Blau: No. Ops normals were frontend. We worked secure in the backend.

Ellerson: There was a thought in my mind as I read the background. Baron was assigned to most DATA at that time. And you were going in the clear..... calling in, in the clear, whenever you had a Baron whatever it was.

Harder: That wasn't strange at all.

Ellerson: No., but I was thinking of the OPSEC aspects. You were in the Vietnamization program at the time. You were training the Vietnamese DATA . You were transitioning aircraft. There was no doubt what the mission of the aircraft was.

Ribellia: They knew exactly what we were doing.

Schofield: MT

MT

MT

MT

MT

Ellerson: Okay. Good point.

Harder: In relation to what you were saying about OPSEC and COMSEC, later on we started changing callsigns daily.

Ellerson: Yes, that was soon after.

Ribellia: I thought it was a result of the Baron 52 shootdown that we decided to change callsigns. I think it was daily changing of callsigns. But the operational procedures then . . . You know, if anybody was listening to us, if they listened to the pilot, especially when we flew out of Ubon, we always took the same heading. We always headed south. When we moved to Ubon, the frontenders were flying the same track. There was a different callsign, but everybody knew we were coming.

Ellerson: According to the history, after you lost contact with the aircraft there were many RF-4 missions and all kinds of Search and Rescue going on, until they took the photograph that we have here on the 7th of February.

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Schofield: Originally, they thought that was an old crash site. There was a lot of controversy over that.

Harder: You guys at the unit took a look at this and noticed that the positions made lumps at the right places.

Blau: Actually what happened is that I had some previous PI experience before my tour over at Ubon, and when they told me that they had some film, I went to the 8th Tac Fighter Wing Intel shop where they had photo interpreting equipment. They identified some C-47 wreckages and I started going through those, one at a time, and I came to this one and identified that as a new crash site. When they said, "No, that's an old crash site," I had them come to check and

MT

MT to show that. was a new crash site. MT

MT

Ellerson: On the photo though, it gives the exact geographic coordinates of where that crash site is located.

Blau: On our photo.

Ellerson: On our photo.

Blau: But at the time, that was just a strip of film. We just ran it through.

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Ellerson : But, I'm just establishing for the history, we know exactly from this

photograph where the aircraft finally impacted.

Blau: That's correct.

Ellerson: Okay.

Blau: But that was three or four days after the aircraft went down. We did not know exactly where the aircraft had gone down. We knew the general area where it had been, and we were looking in that general area, and had requested and requested that fast FACs go over and take pictures.

Ellerson: Okay.

Blau: Let me go back to that incident because, to me, that's one of the highlights of my career. When they called me, of course, everyone was trying to put together what had happened. We had a Master Sergeant Ralph Jasper. Ralph was there and Jim Luther was there. We were trying to put together another crew to go up for the next flight. We had another flight to leave -- it was a normal flight -- about six o'clock in the morning the briefing time. I hadn't been in the office for more than about 10 minutes until Ralph pulled me aside and said, "Captain, I want to be on that flight. I want to be able to go out and show the young kids that we are not going to be held back if it was shot down. And we'll put together a crew and go out and we'll not only do our job,

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but we'll look for those guys too." Before the actual takeoff time, I think probably 50 percent of the unit was out at the Det. At the time we lived downtown in the Krung Tong Hotel. I don't know how the word got to everybody, but they were there at the unit and I must have been cornered by 15 people that night asking if they could go. One of the interesting things that goes along with this is that Capt Bill Shey, who was the commander of Det 3 at the time, was on leave in Bangkok.. His wife had come over and he and his wife were in Bangkok, and Ed Marek [Edward S.] was there filling in as the acting commander.

Ellerson: Now this is at the '94th?

Blau: No, at the Det.

Ellerson: Oh, at the Det? At Ubon.

Blau: Brook Watts [Lt Col, Holbrook M. Watts, 6994th Security Squadron

Commander] had sent him down. Since I had only been there for a month, he felt someone needed to be there who . . .

Ellerson: So Ed Marek was there at the scene that night. I didn't realize that.

Blau: So Ed was involved in this also. We sent out a crew that was just a topnotch crew to go back out after that. That was one of the neatest things, to see those guys pull together like that after one of

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their aircraft had disappeared, basically from the face of the earth, as far as they knew. And the folks were just totally professional. As I have told PME classes that I have talked to, one of the toughest decisions I have ever had to make was to send somebody else out there.: But at the same time it was one the most rewarding, because I had those guys there who were totally dedicated, the backbone of USAFSS, volunteering to go out and put their life on the line.

Ellerson: Okay. Anything else on that night?

Ribellia: You were at what --- 10 Alpha or 10 Bravo?

Blau: I think we were at 10 Bravo.

Ellerson: Describe what that means, please.

Ribellia: The area was broken down. If you were flying in area 10, the area was broken down. I think the division was north to south. Ten Alpha was closest and then 10 Bravo . . . If I'm not mistaken, NKP had a bird up.

Schofield: Yes, we did.

Ribellia: That other USAFSS mission deviated from the mission track and went on a SAR, and they kept that bird up until it was virtually on fumes coming in, from my understanding.

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Schofield: That's correct.

Ribellia: They kept it up as long as they could. So the tasking had changed
DATA

Ellerson: So the other one from NKP that was airborne deviated to help try to locate the Baron 52 aircraft.

Ribellia: Well, for a good portion. I know that the missions that flew out of

Ubon, and the missions that flew out of NKP and from Da Nang were pretty much, even though we were tasked to go in certain areas, but I know we were on our own Guard Freq hoping that one of our guys might come up some way or another. But almost all of the missions that were in the immediate area, except for the ones that flew south, I think NKP had most of those, if we thought we were in radio distance we went on SAR.

Ellerson: How many missions did we have up simultaneously at night.

Blau: Two.

Schofield: That's the most we ever had up.

Blau: Two is what I remember.

Ribellia: In that particular area. Because I know we still had some . . .

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Schofield: When all the units were up, we had more than that.

Ribellia: Oh., yes. We sent up Smokers at night too, out of Da Nang, but not during that particular timeframe.

Ellerson: Okay. We've established it was a high threat area; tanks moving through the area, and lost contact after 1830. So, sometime between 1830 and 1900, we had two missions up and one got shot down or was lost somehow. And then after we located it....

Blau: One of the points that I always like to point out on these pictures is that this does not show the way the aircraft came into the crash site. When you look at the film, the footage that I looked at, it was very obvious that the aircraft had hit up on top of the hill and came directly in and impacted upside down. The wings were knocked off, and part of the aircraft, it looked to me like a tail section, was up on the hill.

Ellerson: How far away up on the hill?

Blau: Oh, I don't know -- 400 hundred yards. Something like that.

Ellerson: A fair distance. The aircraft must have been moving fairly fast.

Blau: The thing that I think is important is that the aircraft nose was still on a direct line with that hill.

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TAPE 1, SIDE 2, BARON 52

Blau: The reason that I think it's important to note where that tail section was, or where that piece of fuselage was and where it hit up on the hill, and its relative bearing with the nose of the aircraft, is that in determining that the individuals were KIA, Col Francis Humphries, who was 8th Tac Fighter Wing Commander at Ubon at the time, the main thing that he said would cause him to say they were KIA was that if the aircraft was spinning no one could get out of the aircraft. I pointed out to him that that aircraft hit straight ahead. It was not spinning as far as I could tell. He totally disregarded that, as well as any other DATA messages.

Ellerson: You mean an airborne evacuation as opposed to on the ground, because when it ended up it ended up upside down, so any survivors would have had to bailout. Is that a correct assumption.

Schofield: Absolutely, sir, and there was an intel report

Ellerson: Okay, but before we get into the intel report, tell us . . . you came in with the Search and Rescue'. You and one other individual.

Schofield: Yes, sir, Sergeant Keen (_____ need first name) who was Bravo maintenance.

Ellerson: What did you find?

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Schofield: We found the aircraft was on its back. We knew it had a full fuel load which accounts for the intensity of fire. All I was there for was to make sure there was no classified still available. When we got there, one of the PJs set up a parameter, and the other one and myself were looking for bodies. We only found three bodies and that was the pilot, the copilot and the third pilot. The backend, even the equipment was burned, and the Colonel (Blau) and I have talked about it. These aircraft flew with the doors on. If that aircraft had crashed with the door on, there would have been a little bit of it left at the top. There was absolutely nothing. It was gone. It looked like it had been kicked off.

Ellerson: Kicked off; You mean ejected? The door had been ejected?

Schofield: Pulled the handle and got rid of it and people bailed out. Because there was about 12 to 14 inches of the aircraft left and where the door was, the top of the door was open. The top of it was not there. But everything else had burned. And also the frontend -- nomex flight suits are good, I learned that -- you could recognize the pilot, copilot and third pilot, and there should have been some remains of the backenders in the fire, but there wasn't anything. Ellerson: Wasn't the aircraft totally flattened.

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Schofield: No sir, it was upside down. But, we found the pilot and copilot right where they should have been, and the third pilot in front of the firewall. There was an area in there where the radios were on one side, and the distribution panel on the other side, and there was a little table in there.

Ellerson: Now, wasn't the backend flat down to the ground when you walked in there?

Schofield: The whole bottom was burned off. The aircraft was inverted and the whole bottom was off. The three bodies were right where they should have been. There should have 'been some remains in the backend, but there was absolutely nothing.

Ellerson: It was upside down. Wasn't the floor on top of those things?

Schofield: It was gone.

Ellerson: It was gone. So it was all burned out.

Schofield: The top of the aircraft was all there was left.

Ellerson: The bottom of the aircraft, which was upside down, was all gone and everything was burned down. There's no possibility in your mind that they could have been cremated?

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Schofield: I thought so originally. I've had this on my mind for a long time because, whatever I said, had a direct impact on the decisions made. No, I've given it a lot of thought and I've talked to the Colonel (Blau) about that, and the absence of the top of the door, the intel report about the four fliers, shock, which indicates that they'd been suffering from burns, which they

probably would have. We had another interesting phenomenon. DATA

DATA

DATA I brought this up and they said, "No, that's happened before." But I had five years in Southeast Asia, 4 1/2 on flying status, and never have I seen them just DATA They were very cautious because they could screw up pretty bad. And they were very amateurish out there. They had very little training and whenever they DATA

DATA

DATA And I felt in my own mind that they had, in fact, been captured and had been interrogated.

Blau: Let me talk about the crew that was there. Matejov and NAME had been flying for a long time. Matejov had been a stan-evaler and I think NAME was too. One of the typical things on a smoker, if you were being shot at, you had on your parachute harness and, if they had chest packs, they had the chest packs sitting right next to them and they slapped them on. And I know for a fact that those guys could slap the chest packs on and be out the door in 1 1/2 minutes, because we

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practiced that evacuation and they had more than ample time to get out a door. I've had a hard time accepting that they were killed in a crash, because I think that those guys would have been out long before they would have gone down with the aircraft.

Schofield: We really couldn't spend that much time on the ground. We had some intruders. or whatever you want to call them, in the area. We called in some A-7s. They had just switched from the A-1 Spads to the A-7s and they made some passes, but nothing happened. And then we got an IFE (in-flight emergency) on the chopper that we were on, so we made the decision -- we had the body bags with us -- to try to recover one of the bodies. The one that was in the best position was the third pilot. And when we tried to retrieve the body, it separated at the waist and we were only able to bring up the upper torso. I carried the body bag up on the jungle penetrator into the helicopter. We

probably should have spent some more time there, but because of the area, they didn't want to put us back in.

Ellerson: Going back to our earlier discussion, there were four enlisted and the navigator in the backend.

Blau: That's correct.

Ellerson: So there were five unaccounted for in the backend. One officer and the four enlisted. I'm raising that because I've read the intelligence reports and I just want to make sure. They talked about four.

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Schofield: There was nothing in the backend. It was totally burned out. There would have been something. After seeing the state of those Nomexes, they are good and they did protect the skin underneath the Nomexes. So there should have been some remains in the backend and they should have been identifiable, but there was nothing.

Ellerson: Okay. Anything else we need to talk about before we move into the intelligence reports? Let me back up before we go any further. DATA in December 1972, issued a fairly scathing report about the lack of maintenance. I guess DATA had complained about lack of DATA mission fulfillment. There were strong implications about aircraft maintenance problems.

Schofield: Yes sir, there were. As a matter of fact, we lost one aircraft. What happened was they pulled in maintenance people who had recip engine experience at the beginning. of their career, but had been in jets since then. So, yes we did experience some problems, especially with the actuator, with the flaps, where one part was being installed backwards and it caused some problems. It caused some hydraulic leaks.

Ellerson: There was a serious concern, and then all of a sudden, it picked up fairly well. I'm not saying there was any lack of diligence on anybody's part. In April 1973, on 304 with the maxi, super goon, one of Marek's reports said he didn't want it to go to Ubon because of overloading. They put seven aircraft on the field, and they had maintenance difficulties down there.

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Schofield: Ubon was the one that primarily had the maintenance problems.

Ellerson: I'm trying to raise every spectre on whether it was shot down or might have ditched because Baron 53 had an emergency at Pleiku two months later, according to the histories. The point I'm trying to make here is: could it have been maintenance problems that caused it to go down?

Blau: If it had been maintenance difficulties, those guys would not have stayed in the aircraft and there would have been maydays.

Schofield: Also, on those four-seaters, they took the the normal engine was a R1830, which is a pretty small engine, but on the four-seaters, they took the R2004D off the DC-6, which is a big engine, and for this aircraft that was a lot of power. I've come in with one engine out and the other one coughing, and it brought us home, and that was on a four-seater; so those aircrafts were awfully forgiving.

Ellerson: On the ground, also, there was some speculation, on the part of the pararescue person, that there were holes from antiaircraft in the body.

Schofield: Yes sir.

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Ellerson: That was pretty hard to tell, I imagine, from the aircraft having pancaked down and then flipped over 400 yards later.

Schofield: He was more of an expert on it than I was, but that's what he said it looked like.

Ellerson: Do you know if there was any effort made to go back to get the other two bodies?

Schofield: I've asked that question sir.

Ellerson: And you don't know of any?

Blau: From what I understand, there was never anyone else who went into that crash site.

Schofield: No sir.

Blau: I talked to Mr. AN in the POW/MIA office at the Pentagon several years ago about that particular aircraft, and he told me nobody else had gone in, although they have made that a priority site to go back and look again, but as far as I

know nobody else has ever gone

"The Untold Story of Baron 52"

Their flight was supposed to be a secret. Their fate was not.

By Alfred Lubrano

Alfred Lubrano is an inquirer staff writer.

The Vietnam War had been over for a week.

But top-secret U.S. spy planes continued to fly covert missions over countries President Richard Nixon never talked about. So, at 11:05 p.m. on Feb. 4, 1973, "Baron 52" lumbered down the runway and lifted off from a U.S. Air Force base in Ubon, Thailand, with eight men aboard.

Over Laos, specialists from the (6994th Security Squadron eavesdropped on a convoy of North Vietnamese tanks snaking along the Ho Chi Minh Trail into Cambodia.

Baron 52 blipped onto North Vietnamese radar at 1.25 a.m., Feb. 5. Suddenly, 37mm antiaircraft artillery blistered the sky around the converted cargo plane, an EC-47Q. The slow-trying plane was being chewed up by an asteroid storm of flak. The crew's last contact with Ubon was at 1:40 a.m.

A search team reached the aircraft four days later and found it lying upside down on the side of a jungle mountain, its fuselage burned down to an 18-inch tube. Searchers reported seeing three or four bodies in the forward section of the plane, the so-called front-enders: pilot, copilots, navigator.

What happened to the back-enders, the other four men aboard the last American military plane to be shot down over Southeast Asia, has been the focus of 25 years of rage and discontent, a slow-motion nightmare. Families of the four men in the back of the plane insist they parachuted out and were captured. But the government decreed all on board crashed and burned. Its proof: an excavation of the site in 1993; that yielded half a tooth, identified as belonging to one of the back-enders, Sgt. Peter Cressman. So powerful is the family obsession to learn the truth about "Baron 52", that Cressman's brothers have spent their lives

trekking from the mountain military camps of Afghanistan, to the Mekong River, to the paper wilderness of the Library of Congress. to the living room of a man in Texas who said his conscience forced him to end two decades of silence on secrets that had burned him from within.

The families' fixations on "Baron 52" ended a marriage and deepened a father's withdrawal into alcohol. It triggered a mother's heart attack, bankrupted a brother - twice - and derailed joy and stunted growth among people whose lives hardened and cracked.

Two of the families are convinced the government lied to them to protect what they say was the war's most unpalatable legacy: that the United States abandoned its own in the rice paddies and jungles after April 12, 1973 - the date by which Nixon said all American POWs were returned.

The families of Cressman, then a 21-year-old from Bergen County, N.J., and Sgt. Joseph Matejov, a 20-year-old from Long Island, have joined a restless and bitter community of a few hundred Americans who make up the so-called "Bamboo Pipeline". True disbelievers, they are a corps of ragged, nearly broken people who maintain that the U.S. government has buried men in the wrong graves and declared men dead, while hiding evidence that they may have been alive.

The war is long over, and polls show that most Americans care little about POW issues or the 2,109 men still listed as missing in action. But "Bamboo Pipeline" activity continues.

Near Fort Wayne, Ind., the Marine Corps is in a bizarre standoff with a 76-year-old widow over bones that may or may not be those of her son. And as U.S.-Vietnamese relations warm, the Cressman brothers and Mary Matejov, Joseph's mother, curse the diplomats and President Clinton for, in their eyes, entombing the truth by removing the former enemy's incentive to provide vital information.

"You know," says Matejov, "my late husband used to say, 'They don't do this in America.' But you learn the hard way: They sure do. There isn't anything my country wouldn't do. "We're just as dirty as any other nation. It breaks your heart."

Within hours of the "Baron 52" downing, analysts in Room 7A119 of the National Security Agency in Fort Meade, Md., were on alert. Four NSA listening posts near Laos - "flying antenna" spy planes, as well as on-ground spooks with big electronic ears - had intercepted North Vietnamese communications about the crash.

According to declassified NSA reports. North Vietnamese officers were

saying, in code, that their soldiers were "holding four pilots captive" soon after the downing, in the vicinity of the crash. Then, there were references to "four pirates" being moved north, and another message that read, "The people involved in the south Laotian campaign have shot down one aircraft and captured the pilots." Intelligence officers say the North Vietnamese interchangeably used the terms pilots and pirates to characterize fliers of any rank.

"The first message was heard immediately after the incident," according to Jerry Mooney, a former National Security Agency analyst who was in Room 7A119 when "Baron 52" went down. In a recent telephone interview, Mooney explained that he was one of several analysts who read the messages. While none of the North Vietnamese reports made reference specifically to "Baron 52", Mooney said, "There was no other plane shot down that day, and the code systems they were using pertained only to that area." Mooney's report of the messages was signed off by other analysts, and sent to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the White House, Mooney said.

In the days following the crash, congressional documents show, 6994th Security Squadron communique read: "Believe ... crew members could have bailed out and possibly been carried north by the winds...." A message to Washington from Air Force headquarters in Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, read, "There is a chance that ... crew members ... bailed out and landed safely on the ground. . There is not conclusive evidence of death."

On May 24, 1973, Roger Shields, assistant to the assistant secretary of defense, and Henry Kissinger's point man on the POW-MIA issue for the recently signed Paris peace accords, wrote an internal memo that reads, "DIA ... feels there is some reason to believe that the four may actually have been captured."

Finally, according to Robert Wilhelm, a former security analyst with the 6994th, members of the squadron received a message from a "usually reliable" Laotian "friendly," who had reported seeing "four, clean-shaven Americans in flight suits" being led through the Laotian jungle by North Vietnamese soldiers one day after the crash. The families of the crewmen were not told any of this.

At 5:40 p.m. on Feb. 22, 1973, a priest and an Air Force officer in a van pulled up to the St. Petersburg, Fla., home of the Cressmans, who had moved south from Oakland, N.J. "We have conclusively established that your son Peter could not have survived," the Air Force officer told them. "There is no reasonable doubt." Cressman's father, George, a World War II veteran, punched an oak beam in the living room and screamed to his other sons, "That's it. I'm gonna kill the[North Vietnamese] bastards. Who's

with me?"

The Matejovs received similar word. Joseph's father, Stephen, was a West Point graduate and former lieutenant colonel who won the Silver Star, third-highest honor for bravery in action, for saving the lives of his men in a battle during the Korean War. He had worked for military intelligence during the Cold War, rescuing people from behind the Iron Curtain. Matejov quietly told his wife and nine remaining children that such things happen in war. You must be brave, he told them. He would cry at midnight, when he thought his wife couldn't hear him.

For five years, there was not doubt, just grief. "From 1973 to 1978, we believed the men were dead," says Pat Cressman, one of Peter's four brothers. "Then, one day, a light comes on," says brother Steve. A whistleblower - unknown to the families to this day - had contacted a New York attorney, who in turn called the families in July 1978 and told them about the security intercepts. Just as the Cressmans were absorbing this, an Air Force officer called to say, "There's a possibility they were captured." "It all opened up after that," Steve says. Pat nods his head, remembering: "The entire family became obsessed from that day on." Pat Cressman is sweating. He lowers the air-conditioner temperature in a meeting room in his suburban Tampa apartment complex. On the table in front of him is a huge black binder that holds hundreds of pages of documents about the Vietnam War. In his apartment are stacks of boxes bulging with thousands more slices of the story. His brother Steve, a deputy sheriff, joins him in the cooling room.

"Baron 52" has been Pat's life work, his quest, his downfall. "This thing has consumed and whittled away the family," his wife, Robin, confides. "My wife married into a mess," Pat concedes. "I've been wrapped around this pretty tight," he continues. "For me, the day it occurred is like right now. It's a snapshot in time. The music I listen to, the movies I watch, the people I'm most comfortable with - are all in that era. Everything relates back to this. This one picture: The U.S. government flat out killed my brother.

"On paper," Steve joins in. "Administrative homicide." Pat concludes. Thirty-seven years old, heavyset with graying hair, Pat also works for the sheriffs department, manning the radio. He was 12 when Baron 52 went down in 1973. For the next five years, he planned on attending the Air Force Academy, took flying lessons, dreamed of becoming an aviator.

Then the phone rang in 1978. "That's when the bottom dropped out, man," Fat says. Sickened by the military, he became a POW-MIA researcher, haunting libraries. "I could've made a lot more money if not for this. I would have stayed in school. I'm a dumpy old dude now. You look in

the mirror and wonder, Where did the time go? It sucks, but this needs to be done. This is my blood." Maybe he's just making excuses for not achieving more. But Steve says he isn't. "Something like this changes the natural progression of life," he says, adjusting the silver POW-MIA Peter Cressman bracelet he wears on his right wrist. Powerfully built with white hair and a white mustache, the 43-year-old looks every macho inch the lawman. "Things seem stifled. You don't move on and do things quickly, because you feel like you're leaving someone behind. You're not happy. You are obsessed."

Another Cressman brother. Bob, who had stepped on a land mine in South Vietnam in 1969, but was not seriously wounded, worked hardest on the issue at first. His fixation may have cost him his marriage, his brothers say. Bob and Steve traveled to the Mekong River to meet with Laotian resistance fighters to learn about POWs. They brought back six sets of remains of men killed in action, but never saw any live prisoners. Steve sold his beloved Harley-Davidson to finance the trip.

Pat, meantime, hooked up with some big-money types who'd hatched a bizarre scheme to travel to Afghanistan to enlist Muslim mujaheddin fighters in their cause. At the time, the Russians were fighting the Afghans. Because it was believed, but never proved, that the North Vietnamese had sent POWs to the Soviet Union, Pat's friends thought they could convince the mujaheddin to swap Russian prisoners for American POWs. Nothing ever came of his quixotic trip. Still, Pat continued to travel around America, learning what he could about Baron 52. He wracked up \$30,000 in bills, and declared bankruptcy in 1986 and again in 1993.

"You could say, 'Enough is enough, get on with your life,'" Steve says, as the air conditioning finally turns the room cold. "But you can't. It wouldn't be right. There's a chance he could be alive. Or that others are. If my family can't feel closure, maybe another could."

"People say we can't handle death. Garbage. I've put my hand on 100 dead bodies. We're not a boo-hoo, candy-assed family unable to deal with reality. What you can't handle is knowing that the government left them behind." In 1991, the brothers got a tip about a former Air Force man who had examined the crash site days after the plane was shot down. Pat and Steve travelled to the Texas home of Chief Master Sgt. Ronald Schofield, aching for news. "I've been waiting for you guys for 18 years," Pat recalls Schofield saying. Schofield began to cry. The brothers misted up. Then Schofield said something that caused both Cressmans to clutch their chests and stare at each other: "The parachute door was missing. Those men got out of the plane alive. I knew it from that day."

Schofield could not be reached for this story. The brothers said his silence had eaten at him, but Schofield believed he had a duty not to reveal secret information. Apparently, though, Schofield decided the right thing to do was to speak out.

In a sworn deposition for the Senate Select Committee on POW-MIA Affairs in November 1992, Schofield testified that the plane's parachute door was missing. "It was nagging in my mind," said Schofield in his deposition. Schofield didn't think the back-ender bodies burned up in the crash because he recognized the bodies of the front-enders. "They were wearing Nomex (fire-retardant flight) suits," he testified. That meant that if there were other bodies there, "they should have been recognizable" because "the Nomex did its job," preserving the bodies.

Schofield testified that he believed that the men kicked out the door and bailed out before the plane crashed. "I think some of them got out," Schofield testified. "That parachute door should have been there, and it wasn't." A dashing figure with a shoulder holster and a penchant for leaving three weeks at a time on hush-hush, military-intelligence forays, Lt. Col. Stephen Matejov was proud when his son was accepted into the ranks of the eyes-only/need-to-know types of the Air Force security service. He and his wife, Mary, thrilled to see Joe between assignments, jetting into LaGuardia Airport, a briefcase of secrets handcuffed to his wrist.

"The last time I saw him, at the airport in New York, I had a bad feeling," Mary Matejov says. "It was a strange premonition. He only had 56 days left. But my gut told me he wouldn't complete his tour." A former USO hostess with a restless woman's yen for adventure, Mary Matejov has camped in the California wilderness and shot Class 6 rapids. She was attracted to military types and married an officer. All three of Mary and Stephen's sons volunteered for duty in Vietnam. Their daughter, Theresa, is a West Point graduate, same as dad. During the Vietnam War, Matejov would picket Joan Baez antiwar concerts, little Joseph and her other kids in tow. "We believed in duty-honor-country," Matejov says. "But what they teach at West Point, they don't practice."

Matejov's brick-and-frame house outside Norfolk, Va., is filled with photos of children in uniforms. After the family learned that the government had evidence Joseph Matejov might have survived the crash, Stephen vowed: "I'm going to get answers."

Using his Pentagon contacts, the retired lieutenant colonel eventually learned about the intercepts and other classified information the Air Force never told the family. He came to believe that the United States

did not want to admit to the world that it was dispatching spy planes to Laos when the war was over. Also, he told his wife, Baron 52 was shot down right before the North Vietnamese were about to release 591 POWs. The American government, he believed, did not want to endanger the release by asking Vietnam for four more.

Matejov arranged a meeting in New York City with Roger Shields, Kissinger's POW-MIA man. Mary remembers. "He told us there was no doubt these four men were captured. He said he had always meant to go back to get our men, but that he dropped the ball." I'll never forget that. He said, 'I'm sorry, I dropped the ball.' "

Shields, now a managing director of Chase Manhattan Bank, says that he doesn't remember the meeting quite that way. "I never said I dropped the ball," he explains. "I did say it was striking to hear the intercepts that 'pirates had been captured' on the heels of the downing of our aircraft. There were sufficient questions in my mind that if had been making the determinations, I would not have [labelled] the men KIA [killed in action]. I'm sorry we didn't get back in to investigate." Shields says the government would never knowingly leave men behind.

Angry that the government for which he'd risked his life had apparently withheld vital facts about his lost son, Matejov grew withdrawn and began to drink more heavily, Mary says. He died tragically in 1984, falling off the roof while doing routine repairs. Soon after, Mary began a life of speaking about MIAs around the country. Recently, she suffered a heart attack at an appearance while telling the story of Baron 52, and has since slowed her activities.

Now feeling old, she says the government is "trying to wait me out," until she dies. But she says, with a wan smile, "I hope I irritate the government for the rest of my life."

On Nov. 2, 1992, a team of Americans and Laotians reached the Baron 52 crash site near Ban Tang Pong in Xekong Province, Laos. During a preliminary two-hour search, the men found dogtags stamped with Joseph Matejov's name lying uncovered on the ground, according to a congressional report. Later excavations at the site in 1993 produced 20 unidentifiable bone fragments, 22 rings associated with parachutes and one half of a premolar tooth said to belong to Peter Cressman.

According to the government. the rings proved the men did not use their parachutes to jump out of Baron 52 before it crashed: The rings would have been needed to hold together the straps on a parachute harness; if only rings were found, that meant they were the remnants of parachutes that had burned up in the crash.

The tags and the tooth fragment show that Matejov and Cressman were aboard when the plane hit, and proved that the other backenders, Todd Melton and Dale Brandenburg, were dead, the government said. "The team ... collected a wealth of forensic evidence from the site," wrote James Weld, deputy assistant secretary of defense with the department's POW-Missing Personnel Office, in a March 1996 letter to Sen. Robert Smith (R.-N.H.), vice chairman of the Senate committee looking into POW-MIA affairs. The evidence, Weld wrote, "confirms that all eight members of the crew were onboard the aircraft when it crashed." He added that "early speculation and uncorroborated theories have unfortunately given false hope to the family members."

One such theory relates to the intercepts about captured "pirates." In a Senate hearing, Robert DeStatte, senior analyst for the DIA, decried the intelligence as "long-standing misinterpretations" having nothing to do with Baron 52. Unfortunately, he testified, "an erroneous impression of survivors was preserved. Yet, the reports do not relate to the loss of the EC-47Q." DeStatte did not handle the intercepts at the time NSA personnel received them in February and May of 1973.

Nevertheless, in 1986, he wrote an analysis saying the intercepts originated in a city 240 miles from the crash. DeStatte blamed Jerry Mooney, the NSA analyst at the time of the incident, for putting his own spin on things through "unwarranted and arbitrary personal speculation." DeStatte added, "There is no intelligence whatsoever to indicate any of the crew survived." The North Vietnamese were probably referring to four other prisoners when they talked about "captured pirates," DeStatte said. It is DeStatte's memo and subsequent testimony - along with the excavation evidence - that form the basis for the government's position on Baron 52. DeStatte, who still works for the government, declined numerous requests for interviews, as did several other government and military personnel involved in POW-MIA affairs.

DeStatte has never publicly explained why he believes the intercepts don't refer to the Baron crew. Mooney - who calls DeStatte "a bald-faced liar" - says that it would have been a physical impossibility for the radio spies who eavesdropped on North Vietnamese conversations after the plane was shot down to have heard a message originating from 240 miles away. It was simply too far, he says.

In a phone interview, Sen. Smith says DeStatte was being dishonest when he testified and that he had asked Attorney General Janet Reno to "go after DeStatte for perjury." Nothing came of it. But, Smith adds, he thought it "bizarre that DeStatte was so aggressive talking about the intercepts when he wasn't even there. Who was he to deny them? No one

has ever disproven this intelligence."

Regarding the Cressman tooth and Matejov dogtags, Smith is equally skeptical. "They very conveniently found these right on the ground," he says. Bill Bell, President Bush's chief of the U.S. Office of POW-MIA Affairs in Hanoi, says finding a dogtag just lying around after supposedly being in triple-canopy jungle for 20 years is "bizarre. and a slap in the face from the Vietnamese. I found that insulting that they would stoop that low." Vietnamese traders have been known to create phony dogtags of GIs who served in Vietnam in the hopes of selling them.

In Matejov's case, Bell claims the Vietnamese salted the crash site with fake dogtags to end speculation on the case to remove potential impediments to ongoing trade talks with the United States. Mary Matejov believed the tags were phony and had them tested, but the results were inconclusive.

To this day, Smith remains incredulous about the premolar: "They buried half the crew on the basis of finding half a tooth." The Cressmans say preliminary DNA testing they've had done is inconclusive. Regardless, Steve adds, a tooth is not proof of death.

As for the parachute rings, Robert Wilhelm - the former security man from the back-ender's squad - says every plane carried extra parachutes and parachute rings. Thus, the discovery of rings at the crash site doesn't prove the men were unable to jump to safety. "A lot of guys wore their chutes during night missions," he says in a phone interview. "It took a minute to get out."

In November 1972, Col. Thomas Hart was in a helicopter gunship shot down over Pak Se, Laos. The Air Force sent Hart's wife, Ann, 12 pieces of bone in July 1985, saying they belonged to him. If she didn't accept them, they would be buried in a mass grave in Arlington National Cemetery, they told her. Wanting to be sure, Hart had two private, forensic anthropologists examine the fragments. All that anyone could know from these remains, they reported, was that the bits were human, and not necessarily from the same person. Hart sued the government, then learned something startling during the discovery process: At the crash site, military intelligence had found five open parachutes, a pile of bloody bandages and the initials "TH" stamped out in nearby elephant grass. She won her suit, and the government had to retract its identification. "The military was lying over what they saw, trying to clear up the books on the war," charges Michael Charney, a Colorado forensic anthropologist who examined the remains identified as Hart's and others.

Sam Dunlap, a physical anthropologist who worked at the Army Central Identification Laboratory in Honolulu during the 1980s, says the lab made impossible extrapolations about a man's identity from dime-sized fragments of matter. "There probably should be exhumations of remains" now buried, he says. Since the mid-1980s, though, the lab has improved. "What comes out of there now is impeccable," says Lowell Levine, a dentist who works for the government. "The lab has made quantum leaps."

The people of the Bamboo Pipeline recite the Thomas Hart story the way televangelists invoke the Bible.

"Talk to one family, and they sound crazed," says Kathryn Fanning, an Oklahoma woman who exhumed her husband's remains in 1985, only to learn they weren't his. "But when you listen to what five families have to say, it gets scary." Adell Thompson of Pale Alto, Calif., was presented with the tooth of her brother, Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Robert Simmons, in the mid-1980s. She says the military pressured her to accept the tooth, and when she balked, Air Force representatives pushed, communicating with her and her family on Mother's Day, Christmas and Thanksgiving, one day before the anniversary of Simmons' death. "They hope to get the family so emotional, they don't ask questions," Thompson says.

Today in Indiana, Mary Jellison is fighting an odd skirmish with the Marines. A Marine major told her the remains that have lain in her son Mark Judge's grave for 30 years are not his. But she's not sure what to believe, and wants to conduct a DNA test of her own before handing over the remains. The Marines say the bones in the Indiana grave are actually those of California soldier named William Berry. In Berry's California grave, the Marine Corps says, is really Kenneth Plumadore, a man the Marines initially said was vaporized on the battlefield. And Mark Judge's remains are actually in a lab somewhere. Who's to say what's true anymore? Marine Gen. C.A. Mutter has threatened to sue Jellison for the bones she buried in Indiana. She'd welcome a public airing, although the stress is wearing her down. "If you let it," she says, "it will absolutely kill you."

While no officer directly involved in any case will speak, Larry Greer, spokesman for the Department of Defense POW-Missing Personnel Office, says, "Each family is provided total access to all information," despite what the Cressmans, Matejovs and others say. The government does what it can to help families, Greer says, though he adds, "None of us is about to criticize family members who've gone through pain for many years."

Privately, though, a Pentagon official expressed another view: "Some of these families will never be satisfied," despite whatever proof they're

shown that their loved ones are dead. That may be, says Al Santoli, former congressional investigator of POW-MIA issues. But Bamboo Pipeline families "are dealing with a U.S. bureaucracy whose behaviour is similar to those of communist governments. It's the same kind of contempt for the American public, and it becomes heartbreaking and aggravating.

People eventually bum out, and that's the bureaucracy's best defense - obfuscate, lie, give false information, and people will throw up their hands and go."

The government has been declaring people dead without ample evidence. No police department would conduct missing-persons investigations the way they do. Lately, MIA families have criticized the Clinton administration for opening diplomatic relations with Vietnam. It means, they say, the Vietnamese have no incentive to help clear up questions about missing Americans. And Sen. Smith charges that no one has ever properly asked the Vietnamese to account for Baron 52.

Bill Bell, who resigned his post as head of the U.S. Office of POW-MIA Affairs with the Bush administration because he believed that the government was more interested in commerce with the Vietnamese than learning the whereabouts of MIAs, says it's "irresponsible of the business community to push us into this situation." He adds, "I'm not convinced men are alive. But they were after Nixon said all prisoners were out in April 1973. And we never mounted a serious effort to find out because we couldn't live with the truth. The Cressman case is a good example."

The White House would not comment. A State Department official said it was "untrue to say we're moving ahead with trade without concern" for missing men. The United States spends about \$10 million a year in excavating remains, and Vietnamese cooperation has "only increased".

At Arlington National Cemetery, on March 27, 1996, a cool sunny morning, four white draft horses pulled a caisson on which a single flag-wrapped coffin rested. Inside were 20 pieces of bone. They were probably human bones; that's the most anyone could say for certain. A bugler played Taps. Seven white-gloved men in blue uniforms fired rifles three times. Three C-130 turboprop planes - similar to Baron 52 - flew overhead.

The Cressmans and the Matejovs had tried to forestall this day. They didn't want their men's names on the headstone, but the names of the back-enders were chiselled in anyway. The family of Second Lt. Severe Primm, a front-enders, was angry with the Cressmans and the Matejovs for delaying the ceremony. "But," Primm's father, Jim, says today, "you can understand the families' feelings."

The Bamboo Pipeline families

ultimately decided to attend not to say goodbye to their own men, but out of respect for the others. The Cressmans wore yellow armbands for their missing airmen. When Evelyn began to cry, Pat leaned over and whispered. "It's not him, Mom. There's nothing in the box. They're just trimming the ends off their package." A woman handed Pat a red rose. It would be a nice gesture, she told him: a member of one of the outspoken families tossing a flower on the coffin. Pat shook his head and gave back the rose.

"It was a beautiful funeral," Pat recalls. "The only thing missing was the corpse."

MIA Facts Site
Baron 52:

An End to the Myths

Summary. Another enduring myth from the war in Vietnam is that surrounding the loss of Baron 52, a C-47 configured as an electronic intercept aircraft that was lost over Laos in February 1973. The mythology holds that several of the crewmembers were captured and never released. Read this article for the facts. Caution: This article is long and detailed.

The most detailed and accurate analysis done of the loss of Baron 52 was that done by Mr. Robert Destatte and posted to the soc.history.war.vietnam newsgroup in November 1997. Mr. Destatte's analysis is quoted in its entirety below.

Begin quote:

Baron 52 was the radio call sign for an EC-47 intelligence gathering aircraft with a crew of eight Americans that crashed in southern Laos during the night of 4-5 February 1973. For those readers not familiar with this aircraft, it is a transport plane derived from the Douglas DC-3. It first flew in December 1935, and became famous during World War II. It is a two-engine, propeller-driven plane. Its has a cruising speed of 185 mph (160 knots), and maximum speed of 229 mph (200 knots) at 8,500 feet and a range of about 1,500 miles. The electronic version, or EC-47, patrolled southern Laos, the western borders of South Vietnam, and the coastal waters off southern North Vietnam picking up enemy radio signals. Operators on board these planes obtained bearings to transmitters and, by means of triangulation, intelligence specialists determined the location of the headquarters where the transmissions originated. On electronic missions the aircraft normally flew at speeds between 120 and 150 knots (138-173 mph), at altitudes of approximately 10,000 feet above sea level (about 5,000 feet above the mountains in Southern Laos). These missions provided valuable

information for the planning of strikes by tactical fighters or B-52s. (You can find a description of the aircraft and mission, and photos of the aircraft on pp. 50-53, *"An Illustrated Guide to the Air War Over Vietnam,"* by Bernard C. Nalty, et al, published by Arco Publishing, Inc., NY.)

The crew of the Baron 52 aircraft included members of the 361st Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron (the men who flew the aircraft), and members of the 6994th Security Squadron U.S. Air Force Security Service (radio operators and intelligence specialists who sat in the back end (fuselage) of the aircraft). The crew's mission on the night of 4-5 February 1973 was to search for People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) tanks moving along the Ho Chi Minh Trail en route to Kontum and Pleiku Provinces in South Vietnam, in an area of southern Laos we designated "Area 10G." Baron 52 departed its base in Thailand at approximately 2305 hours local time, 4 February 1973 (1605 GMT, 4 February).

The flight crew was required to report its position every 30 minutes, on the hour and half-hour, and report all unusual occurrences (e.g., mechanical failures, enemy anti-aircraft fire) immediately.

There was an airborne command-and-control center aircraft (Moonbeam ABCCC), another Baron aircraft (Baron 62), a "Spectre" AC-130 gunship (Spectre 20), three F4 aircraft, and perhaps other aircraft in the air over southern Laos during Baron 52's mission.

At 0010 hours local time 5 February (1710 GMT, 4 February), the commander of Baron 52 spoke by radio with the commander of Spectre 20 and agreed that Baron 52 would fly in the southern portion of Area 10G and Spectre 20 would fly in the northern sector.

At 0039 hours local time 5 February, an American ground radar station in Thailand recorded its last radar plot of Baron 52 a few nautical miles west-northwest of Attapu, Laos. Baron 52 flew beyond the range of ground radar stations at about this point.

At 0125 hours local time 5 February, Baron 52 informed Moonbeam ABCCC that several rounds of anti-aircraft-artillery (AAA) were fired at, but missed, Baron 52 at a location about 17 nautical miles north-northeast of Attapu.

At 0130 hours local time, 5 February, Baron 52 reported operations normal to Moonbeam ABCCC.

At 0140 hours local time 5 February, Baron 52 reported it had been fired on by radar controlled AAA guns at a location about 60 nautical miles northeast of Attapu. At this point, Baron 52 was almost directly over the main north-south corridor on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, near its junction with an east-west corridor between the main corridor and northern Kontum Province, South Vietnam. This was the last position the Baron 52 crew reported.

At 0200 hours local time 5 February, Baron 52 failed to make its scheduled report to Moonbeam ABCCC. Two ground stations, Moonbeam ABCCC, and other aircraft tried unsuccessfully to contact Baron 52 on guard frequencies and other radio channels.

At 0210 hours local time 5 February, Search and Rescue (SAR) efforts began. Within 20 minutes, three F4s, Spectre 20, and Baron 62 had been diverted to help Moonbeam ABCCC and the ground

stations conduct visual and communication searches for Baron 52 and its crew. Other aircraft joined the search later. The searchers failed to find any sign of Baron 52 and its crew until 7 February 1973.

In view of the distance between the last reported position and the wreckage, and the normal speed of the aircraft, it appears that Baron 52 went down shortly before it was scheduled to make its routine radio check at the top of the hour - 0200 hours local. Remember, there were two crews on the Baron 52 aircraft. The flight crew from the 361st TEWS that flew the aircraft, and the electronics specialists from the 6994th SS who operated the equipment in the back end of the plane. **The flight crew had at least two radios, one for routine communications and one on guard frequency. The electronics specialists had at least one radio, which they used to transmit and receive operational data related to their mission. Both crews were well-trained in emergency procedures and, as we have seen, both crews' radios were functioning properly. In an emergency, one or more members of the two crews certainly would have transmitted a distress signal unless the aircraft suffered a catastrophic event that rendered them incapable of doing so. It would have taken only a few seconds to transmit a distress signal.**

In order for four persons to have successfully bailed out of this aircraft, the aircraft would have had to have remained in relatively stable flight for a minute or longer after the emergency occurred - ample time for the crew to have transmitted a distress signal. This pre-World War II aircraft was not equipped with ejection systems. The electronics specialists in the back of the plane did not wear parachutes while seated at their work stations. The parachutes were too bulky and hindered the men's ability to operate their equipment. In the event of an in-flight emergency that required them to bail out, they first had to don their parachutes. At least one crew member would have been responsible for releasing the door near the rear of the fuselage. Next, one at a time, each man would have to make his way back to the door and jump out. Meanwhile, the pilot and co-pilot would have remained at the controls trying to keep the aircraft in stable flight long enough for the back-enders to get out.

Indeed, in a series of letters written between February and April 1973, the Wing Commander of the flight crew described the several types of communication radios on the aircraft and described the capabilities of the radios. He noted that Baron 52 had frequent radio contact with other aircraft until minutes before it became missing. He noted that the crew members received intensive training for emergencies. He wrote that he believed that in case of an emergency at least one crew member would have instinctively used one of the many radios to transmit a distress call to lead rescue forces to the downed aircraft and crew, unless the aircraft suffered a catastrophic event that immediately and completely incapacitated the crew members.

It is not difficult to imagine what might have caused such a catastrophic event. This slow, relatively low-flying aircraft was vulnerable to modern air defense weapons. The crew of Baron 52 reported two incidents in which it received fire from large caliber AAA guns. In the second incident, the crew specifically noted the AAA guns were radar controlled.

Four days later, the search team that examined the wreckage and recovered partial remains of one crew member received both AAA and surface-to-air (SAM) missile fire en route to the crash site. As noted earlier, searchers found the wreckage of Baron 52 on 7 February. **The SAR team found no indication that the aircraft had attempted a controlled crash landing. The position of the wreckage and other features of the crash site (for example, the absence of skid marks) indicated the aircraft had**

plunged nearly vertically to earth, bounced once, landed upside down and burned. Portions of both wings were broken off and lie some distance from the main wreckage. What appeared to be a portion of the tail also lie at least 100 yards from the main wreckage.

On 9 February a SAR force lowered three pararescue specialists (PJs) from the 40th Air Rescue and Recovery Squadron (ARRS) and a radioman from the 6994th SS down to the main wreckage. Their mission was to look for signs of survivors, rescue survivors if there were any, recover bodies if possible, and to determine whether the special communications equipment and documents in the back end were destroyed. Approximately 40 minutes passed between the time the first PJ was lowered to the ground and the time the last man was lifted back to the SAR helicopters. One PJ and the radioman inspected the wreckage, while the other two PJs principally provided security.

The two men who inspected the wreckage spent about 15-20 minutes on the ground. Much of that time was devoted to extracting a part of the badly decomposed body of one of the flight crew from the wreckage, placing it in a body bag, and rigging it to be lifted by a cable and hoist to a hovering helicopter. The radioman reported that he saw three bodies; two in the pilot and copilot seats and one in the engineer's compartment behind the pilot's cabin. One of the PJs thought he saw a fourth body near the engineer's compartment.

The search team did not enter the fuselage of the Baron 52 wreckage. Reasons included concern for possible booby traps and uncertainty about the structural soundness of the wreckage. The PJs contemplated tying a sling from the SAR helicopter around the fuselage and using the SAR helicopter to lift the wreckage and search for additional bodies, but finally decided that the structure of the wreck would not stand the strain because it was too weakened by fire (the aircraft had more than five hours of fuel still on board when it crashed).

One frequently reads or hears accounts by persons who imply that the SAR team found the back end empty, thus "proving" that the four men in the back bailed out. Those accounts are not accurate. The SAR team was not able to examine the interior of the fuselage where the electronics specialists' work stations were located. The SAR team believed that the bodies of the men in the back were pinned inside the wreckage. The PJs noted the bodies of the flight crew were still strapped in their seats. They concluded that it appeared that the men on board Baron 52 were NOT preparing to bail out when the plane crashed.

The SAR team concluded that all members of the Baron 52 crew perished in the crash.

The Wing Commander of the flight crew and Air Force authorities concluded that the facts concerning this incident constituted compelling evidence that the entire crew of Baron 52 perished in the crash.

The notion that four men bailed out of the aircraft originated with the flawed analysis of a very brief item of information contained in a voice radio transmission that a radio operator on another electronics aircraft flying off the coast of North Vietnam intercepted about 5 and a half hours after Baron 52 was reported missing. That message was destined to become the center of much of the controversy about the Baron 52 incident.

There are two versions of this single intercept. The first version was a quick summary transmitted in

the form of a spot report within minutes after the information was intercepted. The unclassified text of this summary is: **Group 217 is holding four pilots captive and the Group is requesting orders concerning what to do with them...**

The second version was prepared many hours later, after the aircraft returned to its home base. The linguist who prepared the second version was able to listen to a recording of the transmission, transcribe a verbatim text of the message, and transmit the verbatim text as a follow up and clarification to the summary contained in the spot report. The unclassified text of the latter version is: **Presently Group 210 has four pirates; they are going... from 44 to 93...** (Tapes were routinely recycled after information was transcribed.)

Between 5 February and early May 1973, an US Air Force analyst named Jerry Mooney, who was working at Fort Meade, MD, attempted to correlate this intercept to the Baron 52 incident. (Mooney acknowledged this in a sworn affidavit submitted in support of a court action against the US Government; [Mark] Smith and McIntire v. Reagan, et al, 85-119-CIV-3). **In his analyses Mooney treated the spot report and follow up report that clarified it as separate intercepts, added details that didn't appear in any intercept, ignored important details that did appear in the field reports, and presented arbitrary unsubstantiated speculations as if they were fact.**

Mooney, who is not a Vietnamese linguist, attempted to reconcile the discrepancy concerning the identity of the unit holding the four "pilots" or "pirates." In his final analysis he wrote that the captives were being held by a Group 210 or 210B. In the spoken Vietnamese language, 210B is phonetically similar to 217. Apparently, he was never able to resolve this question.

As for the numbers 44 and 93 (**the four pirates are going...from 44 to 93...**), he speculated that these were kilometer markers. He apparently was undaunted by the fact that every land route that was at least 44 and 93 kilometers long had a kilometer marker 44 and 93, and the intercept did not give any clue as to which route these two markers might lie on - if they were kilometer markers. He apparently was also undaunted by the indications that the unit in question was located in the general vicinity of Vinh city, more than 400 kilometers by road north of the crash site.

Mooney arbitrarily chose the kilometer marker 44 that was closest to, and north of the crash site. He then chose the kilometer marker 93 that was closest to, and north of the kilometer marker 44 he had chosen. Apparently, he was undaunted by several other factors that other analysts might have considered significant. The kilometer markers he chose were on two different routes. A mountain range separated the two routes. The kilometer marker 93 he chose was located on a route used almost exclusively for southbound traffic. The kilometer marker 44 he chose was approximately 120 kilometers north of the crash site. Etc. **Mooney's analysis asks that we believe that the four electronics specialists bailed out of the aircraft, one at a time, and landed at separate locations in densely forested rugged mountains at night. His analysis asks us to believe that each of the four men decided to not activate his emergency radio. (Each man was equipped with an emergency radio that could transmit a silent radio signal that search aircraft could home in on. He could also use the radio to communicate by voice with SAR forces.) Mooney's analysis asks that we believe that PAVN troops hunted down and captured each of the four men - in rugged mountains covered with thick forest, at night, when presumably none of the four men were eager to be found. Mooney's analysis also asks that we believe that the PAVN captors marched the four men to the nearest road - a distance of about**

10-14 kilometers through forests and over rugged mountain terrain. PAVN troops then placed them on a vehicle or vehicles - few of us would believe these men walked 120 kilometers that night, and began moving them north.

At this point, it might be useful to provide an overview of movement on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. PAVN divided the trail into several segments. Each segment was controlled by a military station, called a Binh Tram. By the 1970s each binh tram controlled a segment approximately 50-80 kilometers long, so that a vehicle could traverse the distance in one night - depending on weather, US air operations, etc. Each binh tram, in turn, controlled several commo-liaison stations - each located about a one night foot march from the other.

The Baron 52 aircraft crashed about 10-14 kilometers east of the center of the route segment controlled by Binh Tram 35. The next segment to the north was controlled by Binh Tram 34. North of that was the segment controlled by Binh Tram 33. And north of that, Binh Tram 32.

The kilometer marker 44 that Mooney chose was located near the boundary between Binh Tram 33 and Binh Tram 32. This was a distance of approximately 13 nights foot march, and two and a half nights drive by vehicle. **Mooney's analysis asks that we believe that PAVN troops hunted the four men down, captured them, marched them 10-14 kilometers to the nearest road, placed them on vehicles, and moved them 120 kilometers through three Binh Trams - at night and in the span of 5 and a half hours.**

Nonsense!

On 22 February 1973, after reviewing all the available facts associated with this incident, including the information intercepted on 5 February, the Wing commander responsible for the Baron 52 aircraft and crew reported to the USAF Military Personnel Center that "there is no reasonable doubt that all members of the crew of Baron 52 were killed in the crash."

Nevertheless, a small number of persons have persisted to encourage the families of the Baron 52 crew and the American public to believe that the four men in the back of the aircraft survived, were captured, and were taken to North Vietnam. Frequently they cite Mooney's flawed analysis of the 5 February intercept as a key piece of "evidence."

One of the more bizarre misrepresentations of facts about Baron 52 took place during an interview that was broadcast in a segment of the "20/20" program on 11 September 1992. The audience was shown a photograph of four American POWs. A former USAF colleague of Mooney's -- Tod Minarcin - - tearfully identified two of the POWs as electronics technicians from the Baron 52 crew. **In fact, the Defense Intelligence Agency first received this photograph in 1968 - nearly five years before Baron 52 went down. All four men returned home alive in 1973. Each positively identified himself and the other persons in the photo in 1973.**

During January and February 1993 a team of Americans from the Pacific Command's Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA) and the US Army Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii (USACILHI), and Lao specialists excavated the Baron 52 crash site. They recovered more than 20 bone fragments, including a tooth of one of the electronics technicians, dog tags for two of the

technicians, "V" rings for eight parachutes, etc. In short, the team recovered compelling evidence that all eight men on board Baron 52 perished in the crash.

Unfortunately, 20 years of exposure to the elements left fewer remains than we or the families might have hoped for. More unfortunately, some persons have seized on this fact of nature and implied that the paucity of remains and other evidence at the site suggests that Lao authorities planted the evidence the excavation team did find.

Faced with compelling evidence that none of the Baron 52 crew survived, other persons have begun trying to find a new case they can attach the 5 February 1973 intercept to; to find another set of families to victimize. **The four persons mentioned in the intercept are not Americans. They could be four Lao irregulars picked up by one of the PAVN units involved in a major operation against Lao irregulars that threatened PAVN lines of communication along Highway 8 and related corridors in Bolikhamxai Province, Laos, during late 1972 and early 1973.**

The 5 February 1973 intercept consists of a single sentence spoken in the Vietnamese language. The translator who prepared the spot report that summarized the intercept reported that "Group 217 is holding four PILOTS... and is requesting orders concerning what to do with them." The translator who prepared the second translation reported that "Group 210 has four PIRATES, they are going... from 44 to 93..." The first translator had only a few minutes to prepare the spot report, but he knew that another linguist would review the recording of the transmission and, if necessary, publish a corrected or expanded translation. The second translator had the time and facilities to listen to the recording as many times as he felt necessary, before he issued the second translation. We can assume, therefore, that the second translation is more accurate. PAVN referred to Lao irregulars as "bon phi (VN telegraphic code: bonj phir);" i.e., "bandits" or "border pirates." **The four persons mentioned in the message probably were four Lao irregulars that a PAVN unit picked up in the Highway 8 corridor in Laos and turned over to the 44th Provincial Infantry Battalion of Ha Tinh Province.**

The **44th** was responsible for security of the Highway 8 corridor from Bolikhamxai Province, Laos, to Vinh City on the coast of North Vietnam. In late 1972 and early 1973, the 44th was operating in Bolikhamxai Province against Lao irregulars. The Ministry of Public Security was responsible for border security and countering operations by Lao irregulars and US-sponsored reconnaissance teams in the border regions. The **93rd** Border Defense Post, located at the Keo Nua (Na Pe) Pass, was subordinate to the Ministry of Public Security and shared with the 44th Battalion responsibility for security of the Highway 8 corridor. If the 44th had custody of four Lao irregulars in the border region, it probably would have turned them over to the 93rd Border Defense Post for detention.

There was never a genuine mystery about the fate of the servicemen on the Baron 52 aircraft. Their fellow servicemen began searching for them immediately after the crew failed to make its scheduled radio check at 0200 local time, 5 February 1973. Within a few days they located the wreckage and inserted a SAR team to search for survivors and bodies. The circumstances of the incident and the observations of the SAR team left no doubt that all eight crew members perished in the crash. The US government pressed the Lao for information and permission to excavate the site for many years. In 1993 American specialists excavated the site and recovered compelling evidence that all eight men perished in the crash. One of the many unfortunate aspects of this incident, as with the POW/MIA issue in general, is that those who know the facts and remain silent unwittingly assist those who

create the false mysteries.

-- -- Regards, Robert J. Destatte

End quote.

Baron 52

Harwell Quillian [abuquill@cfl.rr.com]

Sent: Sun 10/21/2012 3:18 AM

To: bruceswander@hotmail.com

Cc: rlapointe@gci.net

I was a PJ with the 40th in that time frame, and went on the ground on a EC-47 crash in Feb 73. The Jolly ran short of fuel and left two of us on the ground for about 45 min. before the high bird got there. All on the 47 at the time of impact were KIA, there may have been one or more survivors (??).

I do not remember a USMC unit at NKP and did not know anyone went back in after we left.

My home # is 407-568-7561, Cel 407-242-4297 if there is anything else.

H.P. Quillian

Baron 52 SAR

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