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MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

15 September 1988

SUBJECT: Assessment of Reporting by Bruce F. D'Agostino

According to Bruce F. D'Agostino, Hanoi granted "Humanitarian Discussions" visas to D'Agostino and Dr. ^{SS} both private American citizens, to visit Vietnam from 26 February to 7 March 1988 to discuss humanitarian issues, including the PW/MIA question. During the visit, according to D'Agostino, two (apparently low-level) SRV officials told him "the chances are very good" that six Americans in Laos would be released in the near future. The two officials also discussed the possibility of returning the six Americans through a private organization or group. The officials did not disclose the identities and locations of the Americans.

According to D'Agostino, in mid-1987 an official of the SRV Permanent Mission to the United Nations assisted him to prepare a document that D'Agostino titled Simplified Version for Release of POWs. D'Agostino sent a copy of the document to the Department of State. The document outlined a face-saving cover story for returning Americans. The gist of the story was that PAVN units found some Americans held by deserters and rebels in areas not under Hanoi's control. The document suggests the Americans will be repatriated through the private sector and that the U.S. Government should reciprocate by normalizing relations, opening trade and travel, and authorizing economic aid.

Mr. D'Agostino is head and apparently sole member of a newly formed private organization he calls Humanitarian International, Inc. He is a poorly informed newcomer to the PW/MIA issue. He has no political, economic, or public relations experiences or contacts that should cause SRV officials to have any long term interest in him. We are not confident he has given an accurate account of his purported discussions with SRV officials. He has described the discussions differently to different persons. Also, some private citizens have informally expressed concerns about alleged efforts by Mr. D'Agostino to use the PW/MIA issue to raise funds.

D'Agostino seeks to become a quasi-official intermediary between the Vietnamese Government and the U.S. Government and MIA next of kin. He emphasizes the following communication points: the U.S. government is preventing the return of American PWs; Hanoi is the aggrieved party in U.S.-SRV relations; and that private Americans should pressure Washington to address Hanoi's concerns as a prelude to resolving the PW/MIA issue. He has exaggerated or misrepresented the nature of his contacts with several U.S. Government officials. He may be a misguided naive political novice vulnerable to manipulation by others or an opportunist exploiting the PW/MIA issue to further his own agenda.

Nevertheless, SRV officials have met with him in New York and Vietnam since mid-1987. We can not confidently rule out the possibility that Hanoi is exploiting D'Agostino to further their agenda.

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91

MEMORANDUM FOR MAJOR GORMAN

24 October 1988

Subject: American Voluntary Stay-behinds or Deserters

BACKGROUND:

Following his 21 October 1988 meeting with three veterans who are planning to visit Vietnam in the near future, Mr. Armitage requested information about American deserters who might have voluntarily remained in Southeast Asia (SEA). Specifically, how many; who are they; and how much do we know about them.

DISCUSSION:

1. Only 2 Americans are confirmed to have voluntarily remained with Communist forces in SEA; they are:

a. PFC McKinley Nolan. Deserted from U.S. Army in South Vietnam in November 1967. He publicly acknowledged that he had defected to Vietnamese Communist forces. Nolan made a number of written and broadcast propaganda statements on behalf of Communist forces. Immediately prior to Operation Homecoming, Nolan and his wife and family were located near a U.S. PW camp operated by Vietnamese Communist forces in eastern Cambodia. At his request, Nolan was allowed to remain behind when the prisoners were released in early 1973. We have received unconfirmed information that Nolan died of unknown causes in Cambodia in late 1974.

b. PVT Robert Garwood. Disappeared from his USMC unit in Da Nang, South Vietnam, in September 1965. Unlike Nolan, Garwood denied that he had deserted or voluntarily crossed over. In April 1980, Hanoi published a white paper, titled On the Question of Americans Missing in the Vietnam War, in which Hanoi described Garwood as "an American who voluntarily crossed over to the Liberation Armed Forces in 1965." American and Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) PWs released in 1973 described Garwood as a collaborator. More than 200 former RVNAF officers who underwent reeducation after April 1975 have reported that between 1975 and 1979 Garwood lived with the Peoples' Army of Vietnam (PAVN) staff that administered a group of reeducation camps in Hoan Lien Son Province, North Vietnam. Garwood returned to the United States in March 1979. He subsequently was convicted of collaboration with the enemy.

2. One American deserter, U.S. Army Specialist 5 Veto Baker, voluntarily remained in South Vietnam after April 1975, but not with Communist forces. Baker deserted in October 1972 because, according to him, Army officials would not permit him to marry his Vietnamese common law wife and take her to the United States. From 1972 to mid-1975 he lived and worked in Da Nang City. A native of Hawaii, Baker moved about Da Nang freely without fear of being apprehended because he was part Asian and was often mistaken for an ethnic Vietnamese. He chose to not leave when Americans were being evacuated in March 1975 because he did not want to be separated from his family. In mid-1975 Communist authorities discovered Baker's past affiliation with the U.S. Army. He was arrested, interrogated, and released. He was employed as part of a road construction labor force southwest of Da Nang for a few months in late-1975. Communist authorities expelled him, accompanied by his wife and 3 children, in November 1975.

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92

000414