



**A former North Vietnamese mortician, his face partially hidden to conceal his identity, testifies in Washington, June 27, 1980, alongside Lt. Col. Jean Sauvageot, his interpreter, before the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Asian and Pacific affairs.**

**The mortician told the panel that the Vietnamese are holding the remains of about 400 American servicemen. The group behind includes family members of missing servicemen.**

**(AP Photo/Charles Harrity)**

# 400 American Bodies Still in Hanoi, U.S. Says

## Pentagon Supports Mortician's Claim

By Don Sider

Time-Life News Service

The Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency publicly acknowledged for the first time yesterday its strong belief that the bodies of more than 400 U.S. troops killed in Southeast Asia still are sequestered in Hanoi.

The Pentagon agency said yesterday it had identified through independent sources the accuracy of a claim by a North Vietnamese mortician that Vietnam is still holding the remains of the servicemen.

Last January, when the Washington Star reported on the remains of the servicemen, the DIA refused to publicly acknowledge its belief on the accuracy of the claim in the hopes that it could quietly persuade Vietnam to turn over the remains.

Lt. Gen. Eugene F. Tighe Jr., director of the DIA, appearing before a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee yesterday, finally put the Pentagon view on the record. He also told the subcommittee of another, as yet unconfirmed, report of almost 600 American remains stored in a warehouse at Haiphong.

"We have been unable to determine the purpose of this facility or verify the fact that 600 remains are stored there," Tighe reported.

Tighe's public testimony indicates the United States has given up quiet persuasion and will now try to shame Hanoi into "finding" and returning the dead Americans.

Even if 600 more bodies were added to the 400 known to be in Hanoi, more than 1,500 Americans still would be unaccounted for. Of the total, 113 were prisoners of war,

1,237 are missing in action and 1,178 were killed but their bodies are unrecovered.

"We know the communist governments of Southeast Asia have additional information which they could provide even though they disclaim any knowledge and remain intransigent in this matter," Tighe told the congressmen.

DIA investigators are operating on the presumption that some of the missing Americans may still be alive. Tighe described "Over 700 reports from Indochinese refugees concerning alleged sighting of Americans, crash locations, grave sites and the handling and disposition of American remains.

"Of these," he said, "approximately 230 have been first-hand live sightings and approximately 160 have been hearsay. The remaining reports concern crash site and grave sites information."

The 400 bodies are reportedly in the former POW camp that the Americans called "the plantation." They were reported by a Chinese-Vietnamese mortician who had prepared the bodies. He appeared before the congressmen yesterday with his face partly hidden to keep his identity secret.

In mid-January, a congressional delegation headed by Rep. Lester Wolff, D-N.Y., visited Hanoi.

"We were able to present them with pretty hard evidence," Wolff reported when he returned. But Vietnamese officials refused to acknowledge that the bodies existed.

Even if Hanoi does give up the 400, U.S. officials will press for a full accounting of the 2,500.

"If only one man remains alive, we want to confirm that and have him returned," Tighe told the subcommittee. "Furthermore, we want the remains of all our dead repatriated."

# Bodies of 400 U.S. Prisoners Believed Hidden in Vietnam

By Don Sider  
Time-Life News Service

The last U.S. combat troops left Vietnam nearly seven years ago. But more than 400 of their dead comrades remain, hidden away in a former prison camp in Hanoi. Vietnamese authorities claim they are not there. American authorities contend they are.

Information on the bodies has been gathered over many months by U.S. teams interviewing hundreds of refugees from Vietnam. The information has been sifted and cross-checked by intelligence analysts to the point where they say they are certain it is valid.

The bodies, their personal effects and identification tucked into plastic bags, lie in metal caskets stacked four and six deep in one wing of the four-sided prison.

Vietnamese call the place the Citadel. To American POWs, who occupied the other three wings off and on from March 1967 to March 1973, it was known as the Plantation.

Armed with details of the human cache, six members of the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs visited Hanoi Jan. 15. They met for five hours with Phan Hien, the deputy foreign minister, and Vu Hoang, the official concerned with refugees and missing Americans.

"We were able to present them with pretty hard evidence," says subcommittee chairman Lester Wolff, D-N.Y. "We gave them what we knew of the location. We asked them to visit the location. They indicated that there was no time. (The party was due to leave the same day it coming in and discussing it."

They presented it cautiously, courteously, Gilman says, adding "that it could very well be that people at the top levels didn't know about it, because it was sort of a clandestine operation."

"We wanted to give the Vietnamese the opportunity of responding and not losing face," says Wolff.

The Vietnamese pleaded ignorance, but promised to investigate — after the Americans left. In Bangkok en route to Peking, the congressmen cabled Phan Hien, asking permission to return after visiting China to take the matter up again.

The Vietnamese official cabled back on Jan. 18: "The policy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam regarding Americans who perished during the Vietnam War is a humanitarian policy which projects the deepest sympathy of the Vietnamese people toward the American people as well as to the families of those who were lost . . . We have organized a search for information and have (given) all such information to the American side each time we have found something. . . ."

"Regarding the matter you brought to my attention, the following day I instructed the appropriate authorities to conduct an investigation and I received a report which stated that the information you received was a complete fabrication spread out of maliciousness by the Beijing (Peking) group.

"They (the Chinese) want to obstruct and sabotage the entire relationship between you and us

Responded Wolff: "It was more than just a disappointment. . . . I felt that this would finally bring an end to some of the anguish that's been visited upon the people who still have some serious concern about next of kin. We traveled there just for that."

What game could the Vietnamese be playing? U.S. officials think they see the answer in Phan Hien's cable to the congressmen:

. . . . The American authorities continue to refuse to implement Article 21 of the Paris Accords regarding the responsibility of the Americans to heal the wounds of the war in Vietnam (i.e., to pay reparations) and the Americans still refuse to normalize relations between our two countries and even continue to expand their relations with the Beijing group and encourage them to oppose Vietnam. . . ."

"They're apparently utilizing the remains as a bargaining chip," says Rep. Gilman.

Ann Mills Griffiths, executive director of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia is more blunt. She calls it "body blackmail."

If that is so, Wolff intends to call Hanoi's bluff. He will hold a press conference this week to lay out his evidence as a direct challenge to Phan Hien and Vu Hoang. The problem, U.S. officials concede, is that Vietnamese can simply bury the bodies.

Of the 2,300 Americans who are unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, all but 38 have been declared presumptively dead by the U.S. government often over the objections of the families who still wait and hope. Seven are carried as prisoners, 31 as missing.

Even when their cases are closed, the search for missing Americans presumed living and dead, will go on. At the Pentagon, the Defense Intelligence Agency has 12 people working fulltime on the problem, and many others in the field who interview refugees for news of sightings and other information.

"DIA will continue to pursue all information that would possibly indicate that any Americans, regardless of status, may still be detained in Vietnam," says DIA Director Lt. Gen. Eugene Tighe. "My investigative approach will always posit that one or more remain there against their will."