

# Commersant

N42(92)

THE SOVIET BUSINESS WEEKLY ♦ November 4, 1991

## AMERICAN MIA'S IN RUSSIA?

By YURI PANKOV



A former KGB official claims that American servicemen missing in action (MIA) were brought to the Soviet Union and Commersant has been told by confidential sources that one American MIA is living in Saryshagansk. On the heels of these reports, the US Senate began hearings on October 29 to shed some light on the fate of MIA's.

A private investigation by this correspondent has led to

one such MIA, who was brought to Alma Ata in September 1967 and then on to Saryshagansk. The American's name cannot be disclosed here, because this was requested by Commersant's informants connected with the man through work. He served as a second pilot with the US Air Force and was shot down over Vietnam on May 19, 1967.

On October 27 the *Los Angeles Times Magazine* published an interview with KGB Maj.-Gen. (Ret.) Oleg Kalugin. In it he claimed that an acquaintance had personally interrogated Americans in Vietnam.

Two days later, Senator Bob Kerry, speaking at the Senate hearings, presented direct proof of Kalugin's disclosure. He read from a declassified CIA intelligence information report (of which Commersant has a copy), saying, in part:

"Preliminary debriefing site for captured US pilots in Vinh Phu province and presence of Soviet and communist Chinese personnel at the site.

"1. A preliminary debriefing point for US pilots shot down over Vinh Phu province, North Vietnam (NVN), was located at the Lam Thao superphosphate plant (WJ301588) near Thach Son village, Lam Thao dis-

trict, Vinh Phu province.

"Two US pilots were taken to the debriefing point on one occasion in 1965; eight, in 1966; and an unknown number, in 1967. The prisoners were escorted to the site by personnel of the armed public security forces (APSF), and students from a nearby school served as perimeter guards... Upon their arrival at the plant, the guards lined up, forming a corridor through which the pilots entered the building. At this point a Soviet, a Chinese and a Vietnamese greeted the pilots and led them into the building.

"The pilots usually remained in the building for several hours. When they emerged, they had changed from uniforms into civilian clothing. (Deleted) said (deleted) had told him the foreigners were Soviet and communist Chinese. Soviet personnel had been stationed at the plant, since its construction in 1963, but in 1965 the number of Soviets was reduced to three or four, and it remained at that level as of June 1967."

Alexander Karbatov, public relations chief of the KGB's successor — the Inter-Republican Security Service, said he could not clarify the MIA story. An informant, though, from among KGB officers who served in

Vietnam during the 1960s disclosed that US POW's were a target, in particular, for Soviet scientific and technical intelligence seeking information about US aircraft. Interrogations were conducted not only in Vietnam but also in Laos.

Another Soviet Vietnam war veteran, Pavel Ponomarev, said that as the navigator of a transport plane in 1962, he had personally flown US POW's out of South Vietnam and that the "deportations" had been overseen by a KGB official he refused to identify. Other Soviet military personnel serving in Vietnam during the war say there were also several attempts to bring sick POW's from Hai Phong to Vladivostok in the Soviet Far East. One such sea lift ended with five Americans dying from fever.

What happened to the GI's brought to the Soviet Union later, just as their overall number, is anybody's guess. US press reports say that President George Bush asked Mikhail Gorbachev to clear up the MIA controversy during their summit last July. But experts do not believe this will happen at any time soon. Some MIA's may have been "turned" over during their stay in the Soviet Union and might now be working abroad as Soviet spies.