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# Viet Claims Over Missing Pilot Disputed : Asian war: The family of the missing airman, given new hope by a photo that they say proves he is still alive, reject reports that the remains were returned to the U.S. last year.

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Given new hope by a photograph they claim proves he is still alive, the family of an American pilot presumed killed during the Vietnam War on Thursday disputed Vietnamese claims that his remains had been returned to U.S. authorities in April, 1990.

The daughter of long-missing Air Force Col. John L. Robertson, Deborah Robertson Bardsley of Chatsworth, said the family was told by a Pentagon official only last month--after more than a year of waiting--that the supposed remains included some animal bones, aircraft parts and a rock.

A Pentagon spokesman said only that an examination of evidence provided by Vietnamese officials was inconclusive.

In another development, Cambodian officials were quoted as denying a report that about 60 Americans are being held prisoner and for ransom in that country. The Cambodian officials said a team of Americans could visit their country to investigate the matter, the Reuters news agency reported.

A U.S. State Department spokeswoman said no such invitation had been received as of Thursday. But the POW-MIA issue is among the topics that Kenneth Quinn, the deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, is working on during his current travels through the region, the spokeswoman said.

Statements from representatives of the Vietnam, Cambodian and U.S. governments reflected the heightened international interest in the mystery surrounding the grainy photograph that depicts three middle-aged white men and a sign that appears to signify the date of May 25, 1990, along with a cryptic message.

Close relatives say they are convinced that the men in the photo are Robertson, Air Force Maj. Albro Lundy Jr. and Navy Lt. Cmdr. Larry Stevens, all of whom were presumed killed in combat. Robertson's aircraft crashed in North Vietnam, and Lundy and Stevens were lost over Laos, authorities say.

The reported overture by Cambodian officials came a day after Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, ordered an investigation

into the POW-MIA controversy. The Pentagon reports that more than 2,270 men remain unaccounted for.

Members of the Robertson, Lundy and Stevens families, who made their crusade public in a press conference Wednesday, say they intend to keep pressure on the U.S. and foreign governments until POW-MIA questions are resolved.

Neither Barbara Robertson nor Maj. Lundy's wife, Johanna, remarried after their husbands vanished in the war. Stevens had been married for 10 months when his plane went down. His wife is not believed to have remarried, his relatives said.

The families have emphasized that they preferred to work through governmental and diplomatic channels, but decided to respond to press inquiries after the photo was leaked to the media by another party.

The media blitz came amid reports quoting Defense Department sources suggesting that the photo is the latest in a series of hoaxes and bogus "intelligence" that has dogged the 18-year quest for answers concerning Americans who vanished in the war. Pentagon officials say they received copies of the photograph from a variety of sources. A number of activists involved in the hunt for missing servicemen say they had obtained copies during travels in Southeast Asia.

Scott Barnes, a controversial investigator involved in the hunt, said that an American woman had obtained the photograph from a Cambodian businessman who asked questions about reward money. A \$2.4-million reward has been publicized in the region by the American Defense Institute, a conservative Washington-based organization founded by retired Navy Capt. Eugene (Red) McDaniel, himself a former POW. Critics say the reward has encouraged false reports of sightings and generated bogus evidence.

Another Robertson daughter, Shelby Robertson Quast, said she had traveled to Cambodia earlier this year in hopes of locating her father and Stevens and was told that

they were back in prison. At that point, Lundy's family had not identified him as the third man in the photo.

According to ABC News, Pentagon sources said a number of Vietnamese eyewitnesses saw Robertson dead after his plane was shot down, that at least four U.S. pilots saw Lundy's empty parachute fall to earth, and other pilots witnessed Stevens' plane explode after it was struck by a missile.

Deborah Robertson Bardsley described the experience concerning her father's purported remains "absurd" and said it in no way undermined the family's conviction that he is alive.

Bardsley said in July, 1990, that the family got its first inkling of what the Vietnamese said was their father's remains. A U.S. military official, she said, showed her mother and sister a picture of the contents of a box turned over by Vietnamese authorities.

"It appeared to them . . . that just airplane parts were sent to us and it was called remains," Bardsley said.

Nearly a year later, she said, a Pentagon official told her mother that the box, indeed, contained aircraft parts along with some animal bones and a rock. By then, she said, the family was convinced by the photograph and other evidence that her father was alive.

A Reuters correspondent in Hanoi filed a report Tuesday saying she reviewed a single-page report in the Vietnam Foreign Ministry's office concerning the crash. The report quotes U.S. officials as saying Robertson and Lt. Hubert Buchanan were shot down in an F-4C on Sept. 16, 1966, over Hai Hung Province, east of Hanoi. Buchanan was captured and later released.

According to the report, Vietnam carried out an investigation in 1987 to find out what happened to Robertson. "The body of the other pilot (Robertson) was torn apart in the explosion, and it was impossible to recover his body," the report said in Vietnamese.

Nguyen Thi Ban, a kindergarten teacher, said the aircraft crashed near the school, burning 30 houses and injuring several children, the report said.

Experts from the United States and Vietnam jointly investigated the case from February and March, 1990, the Vietnamese report said, and found out that local authorities had sent villagers to excavate the plane's wreckage and fill the crater so they could farm the land.

“The local people had gathered some bones from the crater. The Vietnamese side asked the local authorities to hand over those bones and then did hand over those bones to the U.S. side on April 10, 1990,” the report said. Vietnamese officials concluded it was not possible to recover more of Robertson's remains, it said.

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