

POW/MIA CHIEF RESIGNS

Hopes that our government might find some prisoners of war or men missing in action were again dashed when Colonel Millard A. Peck, Chief of the POW/MIA section of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) resigned February 12, 1991. Col. Peck left behind a resignation letter that renewed fears of a 'government cover-up' that extends from Operation Desert Storm back through the Vietnam War, Korean War, into the World Wars, fifty and seventy years ago. Because the DIA is subject to review by several agencies between it and the President of the United States, secrecy and silence hamper efforts to locate and recover troops not returned at war's end.

Here is the text of the resignation letter:

1. PURPOSE: I hereby, request to resign my position as the Chief of the Special Office for Prisoners of War and Missing in Action. (POW/MIA)



POW/MIA Chief

when dealing with or mentioning the office, always spoke about it in deprecating tones, alluding to the fact that any report which found its way there would quickly disappear into a "black hole."

c. General Attitudes. Additionally, surveys of active duty military personnel indicated that a high percentage (83%) believed that there were still live American prisoners in Vietnam. This idea was further promulgated in a number of legitimate veterans' periodicals and professional journals, as well as the media in general, which held that where there was so much smoke there must be fire.

d. Cover up. The darkside of the issue was particularly unsettling because of the persistent rumors and innuendoes of a Government conspiracy, alleging that U.S. military personnel had been left behind to the victorious communist governments in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and that for "political reasons" or running the risk of a second Vietnam War, their existence was officially denied. Worse yet was the implication that DIA's Special Office for POWs and MIAs was an integral part of this effort to cover the entire affair up so as not to embarrass the Government nor the Defense Establishment.

e. The Crusade. As a Vietnam veteran with a certain amount of experience in Indochina, I was interested in the entire POW-MIA question, and willingly volunteered for the job, viewing it as a sort of holy crusade.

f. The Harsh Reality. Heading up the office has not been pleasant. My plan was to be totally honest and forthcoming on the entire issue and aggressively pursue innovative actions and concepts to clear up the live sighting business, thereby refurbishing the image and honor of the DIA. I became painfully aware, however, that I was not really in charge of my own office, but was merely a figurehead or whipping boy for a larger and totally

2. BACKGROUND

a. Motivation. My initial acceptance of this posting was based upon two primary motives: first, I had heard that the job was highly contentious and extremely frustrating, that no one would volunteer for it because of its complex political nature. This, of course, made it appear challenging. Secondly, since the end of the Vietnam War, I had heard the persistent rumors of American Servicemen having been abandoned in Indochina, and that the Government was conducting a "cover-up" so as not to be embarrassed. I was curious about this and thought that serving as the chief of POW-MIA would be an opportunity to satisfy my own interest and help clear the Government's name.

b. The Office's reputation. It was interesting that previous exposure to the POW-MIA Office, while assigned to the DIA, both as a Deputy Director for Intelligence (DDI) and as the Chief of the Asia Division for Current Intelligence (JSI-3) was negative. DIA personnel who worked for me,

Machiavellian group of players outside of DIA. What I witnessed during my tenure as the cardboard cut-out "Chief" of the POW/MIA could euphemistically be labeled as disillusioning.

3. CURRENT IMPRESSIONS, BASED ON MY EXPERIENCE

a. Highest National Priority. That National leaders continue to address the prisoner of war and missing in action issue as the "highest national priority" is a travesty. From my vantage point, I observed that the principal government players were interested primarily in conducting a "damage limitation exercise" and appeared to knowingly and deliberately generate an endless succession of manufactured crises and "busy work". Progress consisted in frenetic activity, with little substance and no real results.

b. The Mindset to Debunk. The mindset to "debunk" is alive and well. It is held at all levels, and continues to pervade the POW/MIA Office, which is not necessarily the fault of the DIA. Practically all analysis is directed to finding fault with the source. Rarely has there been any effective, active follow through on any of the sightings, nor is there a responsive "action arm" to routinely and aggressively pursue leads. The latter was a moot point, anyway, since the Office was continuously buried in an avalanche of "ad hoc" taskings from every quarter, all of which required an immediate response. It was impossible to plan ahead or prioritize courses of action. Any real effort to pursue live sighting reports or exercise initiative was diminished by the plethora of "busy work" projects directed by higher authority outside DIA. A number of these grandiose endeavors bordered on the ridiculous—quite significantly—there was never an audit trail. None of these taskings was ever requested formally. There was, and still is, a refusal by any of the players to follow normal intelligence channels in dealing with the POW/MIA office.

c. Duty, Honor, Integrity. It appears that the entire issue is being manipulated by

unscrupulous people in the Government, or associated with the Government. Some are using the issue for personal or political advantage and others use it as a forum to perform and feel important, or worse. The sad fact, however, is that this issue is being controlled and a cover up may be in progress. The entire charade does not appear to be an honest effort and may never have been.

d. POW/MIA Officers Abandoned. When I assessed the office for the first time, I was somewhat amazed and greatly disturbed by the fact that I was the only military officer in an organization of more than 40 people. Since combatants of all Services were lost in Vietnam, I would have thought there would at least be a token service representation for a matter of the "highest National priority". Since the normal mix of officers from all services is not found in my organization it would appear that the issue, at least at the working level, has, in fact, been abandoned. Also, the horror stories of the succession of military officers at the O-5 and O-6 level who have in some manner "rocked the boat" and quickly come to grief at the hands of the Government policy makers who direct the issue, lead one to the conclusion that we are all quite expendable, so by extrapolation one simply concludes that these same bureaucrats would "sacrifice" anyone who was troublesome or contentious — including prisoners of war and missing in action. Not a comforting thought. Any military officer expected to survive in this environment would have to be myopic, an accomplished sycophant, or totally insouciant.

e. The DIA Involvement. DIA's role in the affair is truly unfortunate. The overall Agency had generally practiced a "damage limitation drill" on the issue, as well. The POW/MIA Office had been cloistered for all practical purposes and left to its own fortunes. The POW office is the lowest level in the Government "effort" to resolve the issue, and oddly for an intelligence organization, has become the "lightning rod" for the entire establishment

POW/MIA Chief Con't.

on the matter. The policy people manipulating the affair have maintained their distance and remained hidden in the shadows, while using the Office as "toxic waste dump" to bury the whole "mess" out of sight and mind in a facility with limited access to public scrutiny. Whatever happens in the issue, DIA takes the blame, while the real players remain invisible. The fact that the POW/MIA Office is always the center of an investigation is of no surprise. Many people suspect that something is rotten about the whole thing, but cannot find an audit trail to ascribe blame, so they attack the DIA/POW/MIA "dump" simply because it has been placed in the line of fire as a cheap, expendable decoy.

f. "Suppressio Veri Suggesto Falsi". Many of the puppet masters play a confusing murky role. For instance, the Director of the National League of Families occupies an interesting and questionable position in the whole process. Although assiduously "churning" the account to give a tawdry illusion of progress, she is adamantly opposed to any initiative to actually get to the heart of the problem, and, more importantly, interferes in or actively sabotages POW-MIA analyses or investigations. She insists on rewriting or editing all significant documents produced by the Office, inserting her own twist or meaning to what was originally prepared. This is then touted as the DIA position. She apparently has access to top secret, codeword message traffic, for which she is supposedly not cleared, and she receives it well ahead of the DIA intelligence analysts. Her influence in "jerk-

show, she is in the perfect position to clamor for "progress", while really intentionally impeding the effort. And, there are numerous examples of this. Otherwise, it is inconceivable that so many bureaucrats in the "system" would instantaneously do her bidding and humor her every whim.

1. DIA's Dilemma. Although greatly saddened by the role ascribed to the Defense Intelligence Agency, I feel, at least, what I am dealing with honest men and women who are generally powerless to make the system work. My appeal and attempt to amend this role perhaps never had a chance. We, all, were subject to control. I particularly salute the personnel in the POW-MIA Office for their long suffering, which I regrettably was unable to change. I feel that the Agency and the Office are being used as the "fall guys" or "patsies" to cover the tricks of others.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

a. One Final Vietnam Casualty. So ends the war and my last grand crusade, like it did actually did end, I guess. However, as they say in the Legion, "Je ne regrette rien..." For all of the above, I respectfully request to be relieved of my duties as Chief of the Special Office for Prisoners of War and Missing in Action.

b. A Farewell to Arms. So as to avoid the annoyance of being shipped off to some remote corner, out of sight and out of the way, in my own "bamboo cage" of silence somewhere, I further request that the Defense Intelligence Agency, which I have attempted to serve loyally and with honor, assist me in being retired immediately from active military service.

around" everyone and everything involved in the issue goes far beyond the "war and MIA protester gone straight" scenario. She was brought from the "outside" into the center of the imbroglio, and then, cloaked in a mantle of sanctimony, routinely impedes real progress and insidiously "muddles up" the issue. One wonders who she really is and where she came from...

4. CONCLUSIONS

a. The Stalled Crusade. Unfortunately, what began on such a high note never succeeded in embarking. In some respects, however, I have managed to satisfy some of my curiosity.

b. Everyone is expendable. I have seen firsthand how ready and willing the policy people are to sacrifice or "abandon" anyone who might be perceived as a political liability. It is quick and facile, and can be easily covered.

c. High-Level Knavery. I feel strongly that this issue is being manipulated and controlled at a higher level, not with the goal of resolving it, but more to obfuscate the question of live prisoners, and give the illusion of progress through hyperactivity.

d. "Smoke and Mirrors". From what I have witnessed, it appears that any soldier left in Vietnam, even inadvertently, was, in fact, abandoned years ago, and that the farce that is being played is no more than political legerdemain done with "smoke and mirrors", to stall the issue until it dies a natural death.

e. National League of Families. I am convinced that the Director of this organization is much more than meets the eye. As the principal actor in the grand

Signed/ Millard A. Peck Colonel, Infantry USA

I want to tell you a true story that has no ending. It goes back to the frustration that many feel. On August 15, 1985, I received a letter from a source from a refugee who, one week earlier, had come out of Laos. The letter referred to four servicemen BY NAME AND NUMBERS, and referred to one as 'young man die.' No reference to the other three as living or dead. I checked my list of missing and only one name was on my list. It just happened that man was from Illinois. I sent that letter to Washington by two sources. In January or 1986, I received another letter from the same source. This time he referred to a living POW. I sent the 2nd letter to Washington by two sources. To this date, neither the source nor the man in the refugee camp in Thailand has been contacted by anyone to prove or disprove the information in the letters. Who is lying to whom, and who can you trust to take action? ♦