

known SERE training and what disappears on the light table, or appears as shadows or vegetation, is why an independent evaluation was required by the Committee.

Intelligence community search for evader symbols since 1973

This is the first Congressional investigation to inquire into this aspect of the POW issue. No other Congressional investigative committee or body has conducted a general investigation into the possibility that markings observed on the ground may be evidence of live POWs in Southeast Asia.

The Committee was rather surprised to find that neither DIA or CIA imagery analysts were familiar with Vietnam pilot distress symbols, or had a requirement to look for possible symbols, prior to the Committee's inquiry. This was confirmed under oath by imagery analysts from both agencies. Both agencies have since been briefed on the symbols program by JSSA, and now possess this, but there was no evidence to indicate the intelligence community was attuned to watch for possible signals in Southeast Asia after Operation Homecoming.

In the deposition of Warren Gray, an all-source analyst at DIA, was the statement that DIA imagery analysts have always looked for evader signals. This statement is inconsistent, however, with interviews and depositions of DIA and CIA imagery analysts.

Chuck Knapper, DIA imagery analyst, stated he was unfamiliar with distress symbols before committee investigators asked him about symbols in an interview, in April of 1992.²⁶⁴ Mr. Knapper is DIA's principal imagery analyst (one of two) dedicated to the DIA's POW imagery task.

He also stated under oath, that although Committee investigators suggested he contact JSSA to become educated in the distress symbol program, he did not arrange for such a briefing until June.²⁶⁵ During his deposition he was asked:

"So for the first six to seven months that you were working POW imagery analysis you were not familiar with evader symbols?"

Knapper answered, "That's correct."

In response to the question whether he had been looking for evader symbols in the photography before he met with JSSA he replied, "I was not."²⁶⁶

When asked if his predecessor had ever given him the indication that evader symbols were something DIA was looking for in prior years, Knapper indicated that he had not.²⁶⁷

The Committee found a similar lack of knowledge on pilot distress symbols at CIA, both in interviews and depositions. In a meeting with members of CIA's Office of Imagery Analysis (OIA), analysts admitted they were unfamiliar with distress symbols and had no records or tables of symbols used during the war. Unlike DIA, the analysts at CIA admitted they should have been aware of the program, and expressed sincere interest in receiving as much information as possible. Acting on the suggestion by the Committee,

²⁶⁴ Chuck Knapper deposition, page 21.

²⁶⁵ Knapper deposition, page 21.

²⁶⁶ Knapper deposition, page 22.

²⁶⁷ Knapper deposition, page 28.

CIA immediately arranged a briefing by JSSA and distributed tables of Vietnam ear evader symbols to their analysts.

In a subsequent deposition, Roger Eggert, a CIA imagery analyst, confirmed what had been learned in interviews regarding his agency's lack of knowledge about this program. He was asked:

"Were pilot distress symbols something that you had ever studied before spring of this year?"

His answer: "No."

"Was it anything—were pilot distress symbols anything that you ever looked for in any of your imagery analysis before spring of this year?"

His answer: "No." ²⁶⁸

This lack of knowledge about pilot distress symbols is but another example of bureaucratic jealousies or incompetent coordination in critically important analyses.

Contrary to the suggestion of some Committee investigators that "there had not been a purposeful effort to search for distress symbols," some Senators agreed that there has indeed been such an effort. In fact, the two alleged E&E signals given most prominence by the Committee were discovered by U.S. Government imagery analysts. The Committee believes that a recommendation to review old photography, starting from 1973, would divert substantial effort from current operations, would duplicate efforts that have been in place for years, and would cause the expenditure of large amounts of manpower and money with no expectation of success.

Some Members also agreed that JSSA has no imagery analysts available, has no intelligence collection or analysis capability, and has no background in current intelligence operations or analysis relative to the POW/MIA issue. JSSA was not consulted because it was not in a position to offer assistance or information.

The Report states that JSSA concluded that the four symbols in question were consistent with the SERE methods and actions expected of downed pilots; some Members agreed that this statement is misleading to the point it reflects adversely on JSSA. The symbols in question are consistent with expected actions only because they are symbols, they assert. These "symbols" do not relate to any evader signal in use during the Vietnam War.

Another indicator that DIA has done little to address the possibility of distress symbols appearing on photography is its inability to account for the Army's, Navy's or Marine Corps' pilot authenticator numbers. JSSA still preserves those for the Air Force. As recorded in the hearing of October 15, DIA does not know what happened to the numbers. ²⁶⁹

This is a significant failure for several reasons. First, it supports the theory that DIA has never taken the possibility of symbols seriously. Mr. Andrews' contention, in the hearing of October 15, that authenticator numbers were not meant to be laid out on the ground is misleading. Authenticator numbers were intended to be used as a means for pilots to identify themselves, primarily over their survival radio, immediately after shoot-down. This was a safe-

²⁶⁸ Eggert deposition, page 21.

²⁶⁹ Select Committee hearing, 15/15/92.

guard against deceptive enemy radio broadcasts, attempting to lure rescue helicopters into an ambush.

In reality, authenticator numbers were used through a number of different media during the war, including ground signals. The "1973, 1573 or 1933 TH" symbol is a probable example of an authenticator being used as a signal, in conjunction with that individual's primary and backup evader symbols.

In theory, therefore, if a POW still living in captivity, were to attempt to communicate by ground signal, smuggling out a note, or by whatever means possible, and he used his personal authenticator number to confirm his identity, the U.S. Government would be unable to provide such confirmation, if his number happened to be among those numbers DIA cannot locate.

DIA investigation of possible symbols

DIA attempted to investigate the 1973 "TH" and 1988 "USA" and, in fact, still consider both as open investigations. DIA became aware of the 1973 photograph in 1976 and the "USA" symbol nearly one year after it was taken. The delay in receiving these photos for evaluation must be attributed to DIA inaction and a passive approach to indications of the possibility of live Americans.

The area of the USA site had not been visited before the Committee delegation landed in that valley in April 1992, nearly four years later. According to the testimony of DIA's POW Operations Chief, no other investigation or site visit was undertaken for the other symbols prior to 1992.²⁷⁰ The possible "arrow and P" symbols detected on 1987 imagery near Ban Nampo, Laos were not discovered until a 1992 review of old imagery, responding to a Committee request. This site is currently under DIA investigation.

DIA Investigation of the "1973 TH" Symbol. A series of low-level photographs clearly showing a set of four digit numbers, followed by the probable letters "TH" or "TA" was first imaged on May 20, 1973, in north central Laos. The site was apparently imaged again, with the numbers and letters still visible, as late as 10 July 1973. DIA did not receive the film, taken by a low-level reconnaissance platform, until 1976. JSSA first received the photograph for review in the mid-1980s.

Some have referred to the photograph as the "Thomas Hart" symbol, because of the "TH" letters stomped in the tall elephant grass. Both DIA and JSSA rule out the possibility that Captain Hart could have traveled some 300 miles from the crash site of his AC-130 aircraft to the location of the "TH" symbol. DIA believes that the symbol was possibly made by one of Emmet Ray's Hmong crew members who went down with Kay's civilian aircraft on 7 May 1973, some 8 kilometers away. Because Emmet Kay has confirmed he did not make the symbol, DIA has made several attempts to locate Kay's former crew members, but has been unable to substantiate that any one of them made the symbol.

JSSA contends that it is unlikely the symbol, a possible authenticator number followed by a possible primary and back-up distress symbol, was manufactured by Emmet Kay or any of his crew. First,

²⁷⁰ Gray deposition.