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1 TESTIMONY OF MAJOR GENERAL RICHARD SECORD, LAOS CHIEF OF
2 AIR, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, 1966-1968; LAOS DESK
3 OFFICER, DEFENSE DEPARTMENT, 1972-1975

4 General Secord: Yes, sir. Well first let me just say
5 for the record that I had a lot of years of experience with
6 Laotian matters, as I think most of the committee knows I
7 served in Central Intelligence Agency in the field in Laos for
8 1966, '67, and '68. And I was back there again, briefly, in
9 '69. And then I was the Laos desk officer in the Office of
10 the Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs, for
11 a while in '72. And then by the time you're talking about
12 here, I guess I was the head of the Southeast Asia Branch,
13 having been promoted to Colonel.

14 So I served as a middle level officer during the time
15 that you are focusing on here. And I wish I could take credit
16 for that memorandum, because I think it's a good one, but it
17 only represented -- it was the input of a number of officers
18 who were working on this matter. And a memorandum of this
19 nature to the Secretary of Defense himself would have had to
20 have been coordinated, as a minimum, with the Chairman of the
21 Joint Chiefs, and probably all the Chiefs. Roger Shields
22 undoubtedly chopped on this message, or coordinated I should
23 say. And probably a number of other DIA and others.

24 So I was an action officer and it was my job -- I'm sure
25 I was told by probably Assistant Secretary Eagleburger, after

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1 a SECDEF staff meeting would be my guess. When this was first
2 showed to me by your staff I didn't remember it. You know,
3 there was a blizzard of memoranda.

4 And then when I read it I did remember it, but it was
5 unusual for us in my section to draft POW-type correspondence;
6 because we had an office for POW affairs. I believe that my
7 office was assigned the primary drafting responsibility in
8 this case because this memorandum was kind of operational in
9 nature rather than just an accounting kind of report.

10 Because, after all, it recommended a diplomatic track and
11 a military track. Which we knew, of course -- we could read
12 the papers too, those of us who drafted it -- that the force
13 option would be one that would be hard for the decision makers
14 to take given the environment that existed in the country at
15 that time. Nonetheless, we thought it was feasible. So I
16 guess I part company with some who have testified who said
17 that they did not think that the force option was even
18 remotely available. We obviously felt it was.

19 But what was going on with respect to the POW's is we
20 were tracking as carefully as we could all the intelligence
21 information available on POW's, especially after it became
22 clear that there was going to be a Paris Accord. Because we
23 knew this would -- knowing the Vietnamese as we knew them, we
24 knew this was going to be a really tough -- a tough matter.

25 We also knew that the notion that there was a Pathet Lao,

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1 as Ambassador Godley said -- you know they existed but they
2 didn't have any power. The North Vietnamese army had them
3 completely in their control.

4 Vice Chairman Smith: Can I just interrupt.

5 General Secord: Yes.

6 Vice Chairman Smith: I do not want to interrupt your
7 story at all, I just want to ask you a point right there. So
8 based on your tracking, then, there were confirmed U.S. POWs
9 in Laos during the war.

10 General Secord: Indeed. You've mentioned some of the
11 names earlier this morning.

12 Vice Chairman Smith: Do you have any idea how many?

13 General Secord: No, sir, I can't remember. But there
14 were a number of names that we knew with -- what do you know
15 for sure. I mean with reasonable certitude we knew.

16 For instance, the famous case of Hrdlicka and two others.
17 I had personal knowledge of that because I was involved in an
18 abortive attempt to rescue those guys back in late '66 or '7,
19 I think it was. You would have to go to CIA to get all those
20 cables, but there's a raft of cables on that. We knew that
21 they existed alive because we had an agent inside. We knew
22 their names, we knew where they were.

23 Vice Chairman Smith: And I just want -- again for the
24 record, and again I apologize for interrupting your flow
25 there. When you say POW's in Laos, a number, you are

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1 General Secord: I'm not so sure it conflicts with Roger
2 Shields. I haven't seen Dr. Shields in 20 years and haven't
3 had the chance to discuss it with him.

4 With respect to the statements attributed -- that I have
5 heard here attributed to President Nixon, it does conflict
6 with it, yes.

7 Senator Grassley: Who was the dominant intelligence
8 collector for Laos, the CIA or the DOD?

9 General Secord: CIA, clearly, because of the resources
10 they had on the ground.

11 Senator Grassley: Who reported most of the information
12 on prisoners and missing, CIA or DOD?

13 General Secord: That's a good question. I don't know.
14 Maybe 50-50.

15 Senator Grassley: Well, that probably makes it more
16 difficult for you to answer my next question. Who bears
17 responsibility for the lack of hard intelligence, then?

18 General Secord: The Director of Central Intelligence is
19 in charge of all the intelligence community.

20 Senator Grassley: Who should have the best information,
21 DIA or CIA?

22 General Secord: Well, Laos was a real weird war, you
23 know. The CIA was in charge of the war in Laos, not the
24 military. The military helped out a little bit on the side,
25 particularly through the provision of air assets, but the

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1 military had very few people on the ground except for forward
2 air controllers, which were very good, and some air attaches.
3 Whereas the Central Intelligence Agency had several hundred
4 people on the ground in Laos.

5 Senator Grassley: So, then, you just can't say that it
6 should be CIA or DIA that had the best information?

7 General Secord: The reason why I waffled on that is
8 because a lot of the intelligence data came from the air, and
9 was reported by airmen who were in combat operations. And
10 that goes into the defense channel. But there was no -- I
11 mean, this wasn't a turf battle that was going on out there by
12 any means. We shared information constantly and as quickly as
13 possible.

14 Senator Grassley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 Chairman Kerry: Thank you very much. General, if you
16 would also be available to us for any followup questions, we
17 would appreciate it.

18 Vice Chairman Smith: Let me ask one question while
19 Senator Dole is coming up?

20 General Secord: Does somebody want your paper back here
21 sir?

22 Vice Chairman Smith: General Secord, while Senator Dole
23 is coming up let me just ask you a question. Do you know of
24 any individuals who were lost in intelligence operations in
25 Laos who did not turn up on anybody's MIA or POW list, or

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