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.. Document-Number:  
DEA3-000010464

.. AFS\_NUMBER:  
BK2204105193

.. REPORT\_DATE:  
04/22/1993

.. HEADLINE:  
Radio Reviews World Opinion on 'Fake' POW  
Document

.. REPORT\_TYPE:  
Daily report

.. AFS\_NUMBER:  
BK2204105193

.. REPORT\_NUMBER:  
FBIS-EAS-93-076

.. REPORT\_DATE:  
19930422

.. REPORT\_VOLUME:  
Thursday Vol IV No 076

.. REPORT\_SERIES:  
Daily Report

.. START\_PAGE:  
48

.. END\_PAGE:  
49

.. REPORT\_DIVISION:  
SOUTHEAST ASIA

.. REPORT\_SUBDIVISION:  
Vietnam

.. AG\_FILE\_FLAG:

.. UDC\_NUMBER:

.. REPORT\_NAME:  
East Asia

.. CLASSIFICATION:  
UNCLASSIFIED

.. LANGUAGE:  
Vietnamese

.. DISSEMINATION:

.. SOURCE\_VOL\_NO:

.. DOCUMENT\_DATE:  
930420

.. CITY\_SOURCE:  
Hanoi Voice of Vietnam Network

.. HEADLINE:  
Radio Reviews World Opinion on 'Fake' POW  
Document

.. SUBHEADLINE:

.. AUTHOR:

.. AFFILIATION:

.. TARGET\_OF\_BROADCAST:

.. REFERENCE:

.. SOURCE\_LINE:  
BK2204105193 Hanoi Voice of Vietnam Network in  
Vietnamese 0015 GMT 20 Apr 93

.. SUBSLUG:

.. REPORT\_TOC:

.. TABLE:

.. TEXT:  
[Text] Dear friends: A number of miscreants in the  
United States recently spread the news that Vietnam was  
still holding over 700 American prisoners of war, just as  
they spread those fake documents and photographs they  
produced earlier about American survivors in Vietnam.

APPROVED FOR RELEASE  
DATE: FEB 2001

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This is a totally brazen fabrication which has been strongly criticized by the public. In today's International Topic feature, we would like to review public opinion about this news report.

..TEXT:

THE NEW YORK TIMES on 12 April reported that a secret document found in Moscow showed that after 1973, there were over 700 American prisoners of war still held in Vietnam. Mr. Nguyen Xuan Phong, acting chief of the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry North Americas Department, regarded this news report as sheer fabrication and once again pointed out the fact that after the signing of the Paris agreement in 1973, Vietnam **returned** to the United States all American prisoners captured in Vietnam.

..TEXT:

According to figures provided by the U.S. Departments of Defense and State, there were 1,172 Americans missing in action still unaccounted for in Indochina. Of them, there were only 798 cases in Vietnam.

..TEXT:

With its humanitarian cooperative efforts, Vietnam has thus far handed over to the United States more than 500 sets of American remains and has conducted joint investigations into over 70 reports on live Americans and into 135 cases of questionable dossiers. The results showed that there was no evidence of any American prisoners of war now being detained or living freely in Vietnam.

..TEXT:

In an interview with AP, Mr. Nguyen Xuan Phong said that this document might have been fabricated by those opposing the normalization of Vietnamese-U.S. relations.

..TEXT:

Meanwhile, according to BBC, the U.S. secretary of defense said in Washington on the evening of 14 April that the Russian translation of the document alleging that North Vietnam was holding over 700 American prisoners of war should be given careful consideration.

..TEXT:

The British newspaper FINANCIAL TIMES carried an article on 15 April dealing with the American missing in action during the Vietnam War. The article said: Vietnam is not the only one to regard as fake the document recently made public by a U.S. agency on the figure of American prisoners of war in Vietnam.

..TEXT:

The article went on: The U.S. Senate is increasingly inclined toward the view that the best way to ensure progress in the MIA issue is to establish a close relationship with Vietnam. The press article also made it known that recently Democratic Senator Claiborne Pell, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and Republican Senator Lugar wrote U.S. President Clinton, calling on him to lift the embargo against Vietnam.

..TEXT:

In a statement made public on 12 April, Senator John Kerry, former chairman of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, said: The document alleging that there were over 700 American prisoners of war still detained in Vietnam should be examined and analyzed carefully. The translation from Vietnamese into Russian might lead to a misinterpretation of the nationalities of the prisoners of war held captive.

..TEXT:

According to a 14 April dispatch of RFI [Radio France Internationale] and Radio Australia, immediately after this suspenseful news report was released by THE NEW YORKS TIMES, the U.S. Government appeared to be cautious. The U.S. Departments of State and Defense did not rule out misinterpretations and mistakes.

..TEXT:

Other newspapers in the United States such as THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, and THE WASHINGTON TIMES all expressed doubts over the authenticity of the document and suggested that the figure of 1,205 American prisoners of war raised in the document may include hundreds of Saigon puppet regime prisoners of war and other Asians classified in the same category with the Americans because they were U.S. allies.

..TEXT:

Public opinion in the United States and in many other countries also exposed the ugly attempts of those forces in the United States and in other countries to block and undermine the process of normalization of Vietnamese-U.S. relations as they are trying to deliberately spread misleading news on the **POW/MIA** issue.

..TEXT:

Under its Current Affairs Trends column, the newspaper SAIGON GIAI PHONG on 15 April gave the following comment on this matter:

..TEXT:

It should be recalled that in the **POW/MIA** issue alone, the tricksters have showed that their inventive power is very abundant. One cannot help but remember various cases such as those fake photographs which once sparked controversy among the U.S. public, or an allegation by an ex-Russian intelligence official that a group of American prisoners of war had been **sent** to Russia, or a claim by a high-ranking Russian personality that there were American prisoners of war in Russia. When brought to light, these stories turned out to be 100-percent fabrications. Former U.S. President Bush once complained that those with no conscience benefited from the agony of others and that this was an outrageously immoral act indeed.

..TEXT: