

9-24-92

149

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

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 decisionmakers
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,

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. POW's
9 in Laos during the war.

10 General Secord: Indeed. You've mentioned some of their
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 '67,
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

1 obviously referring to a larger number than the nine.

2 General Secord: In addition to those nine.

3 Vice Chairman Smith: Well in addition to those nine.

4 General Secord: Yes, sir.

5 Vice Chairman Smith: And did all of those people come
6 home that you were tracking?

7 General Secord: None of them, that I know of, have been
8 located or even heard of since the Paris Accords. But we did
9 know to, I think, a reasonable level of certitude, that there
10 were more, hence the memorandum.

11 Vice Chairman Smith: Good intelligence. I mean
12 Secretary Schlesinger said excellent intelligence. Do you
13 concur with that conclusion, good intelligence?

14 General Secord: He was Director of Central Intelligence.
15 I was just a low level officer. Of course it was good
16 intelligence. Intelligence, as we all know here, is a matter
17 of relativity and it's a matter of judgment, and you might
18 read one intelligence report differently than I might read it.

19 But there was just a mountain of intelligence on all of
20 this. And earlier somebody was asking was there a systematic
21 method of tracking this kind of data in Laos. Oh, yes, there
22 was, there was a very systematic method.

23 Vice Chairman Smith: Let me just ask for your comment,
24 then, on -- if you have knowledge, I would appreciate the
25 direct knowledge; if you have an opinion, then state it as an

1 opinion -- as to why this data base was apparently looked at
2 differently as we came down to this period of March 28th
3 through April 15th, in that period of time when President
4 Nixon made his statement, Mr. Shields made his statement?

5 What happened differently? Was there something there
6 that we are missing that caused this change in analysis of the
7 intelligence? Or do you believe that there were people there
8 after Operation Homecoming, based on what you knew?

9 General Secord: Well, yes, of course I believe there
10 were people after Operation Homecoming. This memorandum was
11 written contemporaneously with --

12 Vice Chairman Smith: Just specifically tell me why you
13 believe that. I mean if it is based on solid evidence, tell me
14 what you had, why did you believe that?

15 General Secord: Because the Central Intelligence Agency,
16 aided by the Air Force in particular, the air attache
17 organization in Laos -- which, by the way, was very extensive.
18 It wasn't one little office; it was a very large organization
19 with representatives and detachments in every part of Laos,
20 all five provinces, all five military regions.

21 These two organizations, principally operating together,
22 kept extensive records as we were losing our aircraft, and we
23 lost a lot of aircraft, as you know. And all the data that
24 could be collected was collected immediately. It was put into
25 the system. It was reported at least once a day by a sitrep

1 situation report to headquarters, Central Intelligence Agency.
2 And the attache was reporting, of course, to DIA.

3 And so we didn't have the capability to do a
4 sophisticated compilation and tracking in the field, and so
5 this stuff was reported to MACV, MACVSOG, which is an
6 organization I haven't heard mentioned today, but they had the
7 responsibility, primarily, as you know, for mounting rescue
8 operations and also for tracking. This data was reported to
9 CINPAC, it was reported to headquarters CIA, DIA, the world.
10 And so they, in different organizations back here in
11 Washington and other headquarters, kept very close track of
12 these raw data as we collected it, and a picture starts to
13 emerge.

14 We in our headquarters when I was in CIA in Udorn, which
15 was the base where we controlled all paramilitary operations,
16 kept track of this ourselves.

17 Chairman Kerry: Could I interrupt your testimony just
18 for a minute, and I apologize to my vice chairman, I know that
19 is not helpful. But Secretary Richardson did have to go at
20 2:00 and he stayed a little later. If I could ask if
21 colleagues have quick questions to pose to Secretary
22 Richardson, and then we will return immediately to Senator
23 Smith to finish up with General Secord.

24 Are there any questions at this point? Yes, Senator
25 Robb.