NARRATIVE MESSAGE  

PROVIDE THE VIETNAMESE WITH INFORMATION ON THEIR MIAS AS POSITIVE STEPS IN THIS AREA.

2. BACKGROUND: REF A IS THE LIST OF 76 REQUESTS FOR ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM INTERVIEWS U.S. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS PRESENTED TO THE VIETNAM OFFICE FOR SEEKING MISSING PERSONS (VNOMSP) AT THE TECHNICAL MEETING IN HANOI ON 28 JUL 94. LTG TRAN VAN TRA IS NUMBER 52 FROM THE LIST.

3. DETAILS OF INTERVIEW:
   A. PARTICIPANTS.
      (1) U.S. CONTINGENT.
         (A) LTC [name redacted], COMMANDER, JTF-FA, DET 2, HANOI.
         (B) MR. [name redacted], JTF-FA, DET 2, CASUALTY RESOLUTION SUPERVISOR (GM-13).
         (C) SFC [name redacted], RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION TEAM NCOIC.
         (D) TSGT [name redacted], ORAL HISTORY COORDINATOR, INTERPRETER.
      (2) VIETNAMESE CONTINGENT.
         (A) COLONEL LE KY, MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENSE REPRESENTATIVE.
         (B) MRS. BUI MINH TAN, MINISTRY OF INTERIOR REPRESENTATIVE.
         (C) NGUYEN HONG LINH, HO CHI MINH CITY MIA TASK TEAM LEADER.
         (D) NGUYEN HO DIEP, HO CHI MINH CITY MIA TASK TEAM MEMBER.
         (E) PHAM VAN HONG, HO CHI MINH CITY MIA TASK TEAM MEMBER.
         (F) VO THANH KIET, HO CHI MINH CITY VETERANS ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE.
         (G) LU VAN TRUC, HO CHI MINH CITY VETERANS ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE.
         (H) NGUYEN VAN TOI, HO CHI MINH CITY VETERANS ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE.
   C. WITNESS INTERVIEW:
      (1) BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: LTG (TWONGJ TWONGS) TRAN VAN TRA, AKA TU (4) CHI (TW CHI), AKA TRAN NAM TRUNG (TRAANF NAM TRUNG), BORN ON 15 JAN 18 (76 YOA), IS THE DIRECTOR OF THE VIETNAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION, HO CHI MINH CITY CHAPTER. BEGINNING IN 1963, HE WAS THE COMMANDER OF COSVN'S B-2 FRONT,
WHICH ENCOMPASSED MILITARY REGIONS 6, 7, 8, 9, THE SAIGON-GIA DINH SPECIAL ZONE, AND PAVN CONTROLLED AREAS OF EASTERN CAMBODIA. HE ALSO HEADED COSVN'S MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE. IN 1973, HE LED THE PRG'S DELEGATION TO THE FRDMC. (SEE TRAN VAN TRA, "CONCLUDING A 30 YEAR WAR (KEETS THUOC CHIEENS TRANH 30 NAM)," LITERATURE PUBLISHING HOUSE, HO CHI MINH CITY, 1982, PAGE 7, AND "MILITARY REGION 7 STAFF COMMAND, (BOOJ THAM MWU QUAN KHU 7)," PAVN PUBLISHING HOUSE, HANOI, 1994, PAGE 132. DURING THE INTERVIEW, LTG TRA REFERRED TO THE B-2 FRONT AS "MIEN" (MIEENF), WHICH MEANS "REGION" IN VIETNAMESE. THE VIETNAMESE ALSO REFER TO THE B-2 FRONT AS "R" REPRESENTING THE FRENCH WORD "REGION". "MIEN" ALSO REFERS TO THE HQ, SOUTH VIETNAM LIBERATION ARMY.)

(2) WITNESS RELIABILITY: LTG TRA CLAIMED TO KNOW NO SPECIFIC INFORMATION ON U.S. POWS OR MIAS AND AVOIDED ADDRESSING SPECIFIC QUESTIONS. THOUGH THERE WAS NO INDICATION HE WAS WITHHOLDING PERTINENT INFORMATION, HE MANAGED TO CONFINE THE INTERVIEW TO A LIMITED RANGE OF SUBJECTS. THE INFORMATION HE DID PROVIDE IS PROBABLY VALID AND HAS LIMITED PERTINENCE TO THE U.S. POW/MIA ISSUE. THE APPARENT OBJECTIVE OF THE MEETING FOR LTG TRA WAS:

(A) TO GIVE THE U.S. SIDE HIS VIEWPOINT ON THE POW/MIA ISSUE.
(B) TO ADDRESS RECENT ADVANCES IN RELATIONS BETWEEN BOTH COUNTRIES VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS.
(C) TO GIVE HIS OPINION ON THE BEST WAY FOR THE U.S. TO PROCEED WITH ITS POW/MIA MISSION.

(3) STATEMENT:


(B) LTG TRA SAID THAT EACH PAVN ECHELON, BEGINNING AT SQUAD LEVEL, HAD A POLITICAL OFFICER. POLITICAL INFORMATION (INCLUDING U.S. POW INFORMATION) FLOWED UP-ECHELON THROUGH EACH UNIT'S POLITICAL OFFICER, THEREBY MAINTAINING THE POLITICAL SYSTEM'S ORDER. THE SYSTEM REQUIRED ALL REPORTS TO BE COMPLETE AND EXACT. HOWEVER, LTG TRA EXPLAINED, THE WAR WAS VERY FIERCE. THERE WERE TIMES WHEN B-52 STRIKES AND OTHER BATTLE DAMAGE "WASTED" BOTH POLITICAL AND MILITARY RECORDS.
VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST SIDE HAD LESS ABILITY TO MAINTAIN
BATTLEFIELD RECORDS THAN THE U.S. SIDE, AND THEY LOST MANY
RECORDS.

(C) LTG TRA TOLD THE JOINT INTERVIEW TEAM HE WAS A
BATTLEFIELD COMMANDER DURING THE WAR AND, AS SUCH, CONCERNED
HIMSELF WITH MILITARY MATTERS. THEREFORE, HE REASONED, HE HAD
NO INFORMATION ON SPECIFIC CAPTURES, DETENTION CAMPS,
PRISONERS, OR DEATH LOCATIONS. THIS TYPE OF POLITICAL
INFORMATION REMAINED WITHIN THE MILITARY’S POLITICAL CHAIN OF
COMMAND. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN TO A BATTLEFIELD COMMANDER’S
DETRIMENT TO WORRY ABOUT THOSE TYPES OF DETAILS — LTG TRA SAID
HIS CONCERN WAS TACTICS. HE SAID HE DID, HOWEVER, KNOW ABOUT
BATTLEFIELD POLICY WITH RELATION TO POWS.

(D) LTG TRA SAID THAT ACCORDING TO HO CHI MINH’S
IDEOLOGY, THE PAVN CONSIDERED THE OPPOSITION TO BE HUMAN. IN
THIS SPIRIT, WHEN AN OPPOSITION SOLDIER BECAME A POW, THE PAVN
CONSIDERED HIM A HUMAN BEING, NOT A COMBATANT. LTG TRA SAID
HIS FORCES TREATED POWS EXTREMELY WELL. THEY MEDICALLY TREATED
WOUNDED POWS AS THEY WOULD TREAT THEIR OWN AND PROVIDED
PROVISIONS OFTEN BETTER THAN THE FOOD THEIR OWN TROOPS ATE.
ADHERING TO THIS HUMANITARIAN POLICY WAS A MATTER OF DISCIPLINE
FOR LTG TRA’S CADRE AND SOLDIERS. THE PAVN SEVERELY
DISCIPLINED ALL WHO VIOLATED THE POLICY.

(E) IN RESPONSE TO DIRECT QUESTIONS REGARDING THE
PRG’S DIC LIST, HE SAID HE DID NOT KNOW ABOUT THIS LIST. HE
ALSO SAID HE DID NOT REMEMBER ANY SPECIFIC POLITICAL CADRE
INVOLVED WITH U.S. POW REPATRIATION AT LOC NINH. (NOTE: A
REVIEW OF LTG TRA’S BOOK, "CONCLUDING A 30 YEAR WAR," DID NOT
PRODUCE THE NAMES OF ANY SPECIFIC POLITICAL CADRE INVOLVED WITH
U.S. POW REPATRIATION. THE BOOK DID MENTION, HOWEVER, THAT
MAJOR (MRS.) NGUYEN THI DUNG (NGUYENX THIJ ZUNG, AKA NGUYENX
NGOCJ ZUNG) PARTICIPATED IN REPATRIATING REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
ARMED FORCES POWS. A JOINT ORAL HISTORY TEAM INTERVIEWED MRS.
DUNG ON 16 JAN 95, AND SHE CORROBORATED THE ACCOUNT IN LTG
TRA’S BOOK. SHE SAID SHE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH REPATRIATING U.S.
POWS) LTG TRA DID, HOWEVER, RECALL A STORY INVOLVING THE
LAST U.S. POW THE PRG’S DELEGATION TO THE FPJMC REPATRIATED IN
1973. AT THAT TIME, ALL LOCATIONS HOLDING POWS HAD PROVIDED
POW LISTS AND THE PRG HAD REPATRIATED ALL THE U.S. POWS ON THE
LISTS. LTG TRA THEN RECEIVED A LATE REPORT THAT A U.S. POW
REMAINED IN DETENTION IN TRA VINH PROVINCE. HE INFORMED
BRIGADIER GENERAL WOODWARD, COMMANDER OF THE U.S. DELEGATION TO
THE FPJMC, AND ARRANGED FOR THE LAST POW, WHO HAD NOT BEEN ON
ANY LIST, TO BE REPATRIATED. (NOTE: THIS ACCOUNT CORRELATES TO
REFNO 1523-2-02, BASED ON CAPTIVITY LOCATION AND RELEASE
CIRCUMSTANCES. LTG TRA SAID MR. (EUGENE, AKA ANDRE) SAUVAGEOT,
A U.S. CITIZEN, NOW A BUSINESSMAN IN VIETNAM, KNEW ABOUT THIS
LAST REPATRIATION. IN HIS BOOK, "CONCLUDING A 30 YEAR WAR,"
LTG TRA SAYS MR. SAUVAGEOT WAS AN INTERPRETER PRESENT WHEN HE
(FLT TRA) INFORMED BRIGADIER GENERAL WOODWARD OF THE LATE U.S.
POW REPATRIATION. FOR A MORE COMPLETE ACCOUNT OF THIS INCIDENT, SEE "CONCLUDING A 30 YEAR WAR," PAGES 44 AND 45.)

(F) CONCERNING OTHER PERSONS WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO PROVIDE U.S. POW/MIA INFORMATION, LTG TRA SAID HE REMEMBERED NO ONE STILL LIVING WHO HE BELIEVED COULD HELP. HE MENTIONED THAT GENERAL DAIJ TWONG (NGUYEN CHI THANH) (DECEASED) AND PHAM HUNG (PHAMJ HUNGF) (DECEASED), B-2 FRONT POLITICAL COMMISSAR, MIGHT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PROVIDE RELATED INFORMATION WERE THEY STILL LIVING. (NOTE: ACCORDING TO DET 2 ARCHIVAL SOURCES, NGUYEN CHI THANH WAS POLITICAL OFFICER AND COMMANDER OF COSVN BEGINNING IN 1964. HE DIED OF A HEART ATTACK AT HOSPITAL 103, HA DONG PROVINCE, ON 6 JUL 67. LTG TRA FREQUENTLY MENTIONS PHAM HUNG, AKA BAY (7) CUONG (BAYR CWONGF) IN HIS BOOK. THE FIRST REFERENCE TO PHAM HUNG IS ON PAGE 16.)

(G) REGARDING THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS OF RESOLVING THE U.S. MIA ISSUE, LTG TRA OPINED THE U.S. SHOULD RELY ON THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE. HE SAID THAT DURING THE WAR, IN ADDITION TO MAIN FORCE UNITS (LMCJ LWONGJ CHUR YEEUS), LOCAL MILITIA (QUAN DIAJ PHWONG), AND GUERRILLAS (ZU KICHS), THE VIETNAMESE FIGHTING FORCE INCLUDED CIVILIAN COMBATANTS IN EVERY LOCALITY. THEREFORE, IF THE U.S. DEMONSTRATES THAT IT CARES AS MUCH ABOUT THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE'S MIAS AS IT DOES ITS OWN, THE PEOPLE WHO WERE INVOLVED AND UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION, WILL BECOME "EMOTIONALLY INVOLVED" AND HELP THE U.S. EFFORT. LTG TRA NOTED THAT U.S. VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS RECENTLY PROVIDING DOCUMENTS THAT HELPED VIETNAM LOCATE SOME OF ITS MIAS WAS A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION TOWARD THIS OBJECTIVE. HE SAID THAT DURING RECENT MEETINGS WITH U.S. VETERANS GROUPS, BOTH SIDES PLEDGED MAXIMUM RECIPROCAL SUPPORT FOR EACH OTHER'S MIA EFFORTS. TO THAT END, LTG TRA SAID HE HAD PERSONALLY APPEALED TO HO CHI MINH CITY AREA VETERANS TO COME FORWARD WITH ANY AND ALL INFORMATION CONCERNING UNACCOUNTED FOR AMERICANS.

4. MATERIAL EVIDENCE: NONE.

5. COMMENTS:
A. POTENTIAL LEADS: NONE.
B. INTERVIEWER COMMENTS: THIS ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH LTG TRAN VAN TRA WAS MUCH MORE FORMAL THAN MOST PAST INTERVIEWS. CONTRIBUTING TO THE SITUATION'S FORMALITY, THE COMMANDER, JTF-FA/DET 2, THE JTF-FA/DET 2 CASUALTY RESOLUTION SUPERVISOR, AND MEMBERS OF LTG TRA'S STAFF WERE IN ATTENDANCE. AFTER OPENING STATEMENTS, LTG TRA, BASED ON A LIST OF QUESTIONS PROVIDED BEFORE-HAND BY THE U.S. SIDE, MADE HIS STATEMENT AS RECORDED IN (PARA 3C(3)), ABOVE. HE MADE IT CLEAR HE KNEW NO SPECIFIC INFORMATION AND WOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO ADDRESS ANYTHING SPECIFIC. THE MEETING WAS CORDIAL, HOWEVER, WITH THE FINAL EMPHASIS BEING ON RECIPROCAL COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES AND THEIR VETERANS GROUPS. I BELIEVE THAT ONE OF THE
MOST SIGNIFICANT ASPECTS OF THIS INTERVIEW WAS THE DISCUSSION ABOUT U.S. VETERANS ASSISTING THE VIETNAMESE IN ACCOUNTING FOR THEIR MISSING. THIS SEEMED TO IMPRESS LTG TRA AND MAY INDUCE HIM TO PUSH THE MEMBERSHIP OF HIS VETERANS ORGANIZATION TO HELP RESOLVE THE ISSUE OF OUR UNACCOUNTED-FOR.