DEPOSITION OF ROBERT GARWOOD

Tuesday, January 21, 1992

U.S. Senate
Select Committee on
POW/MIA Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Deposition of ROBERT GARWOOD, a witness herein, called for examination by counsel for the Select Committee, pursuant to notice, the witness having been duly sworn by MARK T. EGAN, a Notary Public in and for the District of Columbia, taken at the office of Hon. Robert D. Smith, Room SD-336, Dirksen Senate Office Building, commencing at 9:53 a.m., and the proceedings being taken down by Stenomask by MARK T. EGAN, CVR-CM, and transcribed under his direction.

PRESENT:

HON. ROBERT C. SMITH
U.S. Senator from New Hampshire
APPEARANCES:

On behalf of the Committee:

J. WILLIAM CODINHA, ESQ., Chief Counsel
FRANCES ZWENIG, Staff Director
DINO CARLUCCIO, Staff of Senator Smith

On behalf of the Witness:

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being from the top of that hill, about the length of a
football field.

Q. So that’s about 100 yards?
A. Yes, or even maybe a little further than that, at
least.

Q. How many Americans did you see?
A. In a day or over a period of time?
Q. Let’s first go to before Homecoming.
A. All right, prior to Homecoming, the problem I had is
I can never tell whether I had seen the same person twice.

Q. Sure, I understand that.
A. So I can -- the best thing is I can use different
sightings, and I can use different sightings rather than try
to define whether it is the same person I saw, the same hooch
or what, so I don’t know what they did and how they did it
down there.

But over the 2 year period --
Q. 2 year beginning when?
A. ’71 approximately, even before they really started
letting me out of camp to forage for wood and do other stuff,
about March of ’71.

Q. To March of ’73?
A. Yes, March, April, yes, February, March, just prior
to the release, so-called release.
Q. How many do you estimate you saw during that time
period, Americans?

A. Sightings, I never saw a group. I don't remember seeing a group of them out. They were scattered and they were usually hanging outside the building just sitting there. I saw a couple of them walking. They were different and they stood out. They wore a different uniform than I did. The ARVNs, for example, wore the stripped pajamas.

Q. What colors?

A. Red and white, it was white at one time, I don't know, like an orange and white or red and white. What I was wearing was the replica of the black pajamas in South Vietnam, except here they were blue, the same material.

Q. What did the American prisoners wear, the other American prisoners?

A. Right. The shirts were short-sleeved. They looked more like trousers than pajamas. The shirt was like a pajama top, but the trousers weren't like the pajamas bottoms, the baggy, but more like they were pants, like pants with pockets.

Q. What color were they?

A. Blue.

Q. Same color blue you wore?

A. No, I was a dark blue, they were blue, but light, almost white, like they had been bleached out or worn or washed quite a few times.

Q. Were they all dressed the same?
A. Yes.

Q. Do you have a sense during that period up until Homecoming how many you saw, Americans?

A. I am not able to or not willing to say how many I saw, the sightings and the sightings really only took place during my wood forage. I have to think about that one. I never saw any of them in a group. I don't remember seeing any in group. I did find out through questioning the guards that they also, they weren't allowed to talk to one another.

Q. How far apart were their little huts from each other?

A. They looked to be about 20 to 25 feet.

Q. Would you see more than one outside of a building at a time?

A. About the distance of this room -- yes, but none right next to each other. It would be sporadic.

Q. Were there fences around each of the huts?

A. No. There was a vegetable garden that surrounded the entire hut.

Q. So the entire 20 or 25 group of huts had a vegetable garden all around it?

A. Yes.

Q. There were no fences around it however?

A. No.

Q. Now you described earlier a day in the life of
Q. And what were they armed with?
A. AK-47s.
Q. When you did calisthenics, who did them with you if anyone?
A. No one.
Q. Did someone instruct you what to do?
A. No.
Q. You just did whatever calisthenics you wanted to do?
A. Yes. I didn’t have to do them if I didn’t want to.
Q. When you had breakfast, with whom would you eat if anyone?
A. By myself.
Q. Did the guards eat with you?
A. No.
Q. How did your food arrive?
A. It was cooked right there.
Q. Was it prepared for you or did you prepare it?
A. It was prepared by the guards.
Q. When you went to do work details, where did you do your work details, and I realize you described at least three or four different times, you described repairing roads, you described getting fire wood, you described working the rice paddies. Why don’t we take them one at a time.
Q. When you repaired roads, where did you do that work?
A. There were crude roads that were right there within
the perimeters -- in view of the camp.

Q. Was it within the perimeters of Bat Bat?
A. Yes.

Q. So you didn't go outside the 7 kilometer -- I am sorry, the 7 kilometer square area?
A. No.

Q. Did you work with any other Americans in repairing those roads?
A. ARVN's, yes.

Q. Did you ever see other Americans repairing the roads?
A. No.

Q. When you collected firewood, did you do that by yourself or with other people?
A. By myself. It was collect the firewood that the guards used to cook my meals.

Q. When you worked in the rice paddies, did you do that by yourself or with other people?
A. With other people, but separate. In other words, I didn't work right beside the other people, but no other Americans, no.

Q. You never worked with other Americans during the time you were at Bat Bat?
A. No.

Q. When you listened to the radio, was that in your
Q. What was Bavi?
A. It was, close to the camp, a mountainous area.
Q. It was their dairy farm?
A. Not as big as a mountain, but bigger than a hill. It's Bavi dairy farm.
Q. And what did you know about Bavi dairy farm?
A. I learned that the Bavi dairy farm was built, constructed and set up by Cubans.
Q. When?
A. In 1969, '69 or '70 and that Cuba had donated some of its prized bulls to this farm for breeding purposes, and that French prisoners who had been incarcerated at the Yen Bai tea plantation, they had moved all these people from Yen Bai to Bavi to--
Q. You have to spell Yen Bai.
A. Y-e-n, Bai, B-a-i, to Bavi for the purpose of operating and serving as the labor force for the dairy farm.
Q. Did you ever meet any of the French prisoners at Bavi?
A. Yes, one.
Q. When was that?
A. It wasn't much later, that was late '73, I think it was late '73.
Q. What was the occasion you met a prisoner at Bavi?
A. He was out with the water buffalo out in the rice
paddies, it was after they harvested the rice. So it had to
be in the fall. It was after the harvest of the rice, after
the harvest of the rice they bring the water buffalo and the
cows and stuff to graze, to forage the rice droppings. I came
to understand that he was where he wasn't supposed to be. By
this time I had been in the camp for years, for over 3 years,
I guess. Things had gotten a little more relaxed and I didn't
really cause any problems, and I was less threatening, and
because of the dress -- he dressed like a Vietnamese, you
couldn't even tell that he was -- he had foreign features when
you got right up close and the guards didn't even know it.

But I was catching frogs, I was trying to catch
frogs along the rice paddy, frogs and little crabs. I used
them to supplement my meal, if I could catch them, and he came
up to me and rattled off this French and I just looked up to
him and he, when I first looked at him he had the hard lines,
he looked kind of Vietnamese, but he had round eyes and the
features of a European, and I had heard about a lot of the
offspring of 100 years of French domination, there are a lot
of Vietnamese that bore children that looked more European
than they did Oriental, and so I figured he was one of these
guys.

And then he saw that I couldn't speak French, he
spoke Vietnamese. He said, do you speak Vietnamese and I said
yes, and he just started talking. He thought they were
setting up another farm right there where my camp was and I
told him not to my knowledge, but I was more curious about
him, where he came from when he was captured. At the outside
of the French Dien Bien Phu, he was with the French Foreign
Legion and a Moroccan, and I didn't even know where Morocco
was, I think I even asked him that. And he looked to be late
50s, early 60s, and I just found it totally amazing. I kind
of visualized myself looking like him after the same time
period.

He told me about the tea plantation in Yen Bai and
everything, that they had cut away the forest and planted the
tea, and that the -- we had a pretty long conversation. I
asked him why he was still here and he says, well -- it had to
be -- it was after Operation Homecoming, because he asked me
the same thing, he said, why are you still here?

Then he went ahead to explain, he said, well, the
French Foreign Legion -- he asked me if I knew about the
French Foreign Legion and I said no, but I knew of it, didn't
know about it. He said, well, if you go into the French
Foreign Legion you give up your right to citizenship. And by
giving up that right, if you should ever become prisoner,
there is no one to come in after you. There is no diplomat to
go to. There is no one to argue your case for you.

And being a French Legionnaire you understand this,
but being a French Legionnaire, it's an elite unit, no other
Q. So that was in early '73, March, April.
A. Yes. The first group was released, and the second group was released.
Q. How did you know the first group was released?
A. They announced it on the radio.
Q. Now, prior to the first group being released, did you have any conversations with any of your captors about your release?
A. No. That was only after the second group. It wasn't until the second group was released.
Q. So you heard the first group was released.
A. Yes.
Q. What did you hear?
A. Just that. I think they gave a number and the procedure took place and some type of ceremony at Ton Son Nhut Air Base, the U.S. side receiving -- receiving the pilots and how things supposedly went smooth, and that then it was going to be the release of the Vietnamese from the Saigon prisons and that within coordination of that release, then there would be another group released.
Q. Did you have some conversation with your captors after the first release?
A. The guards actually thought I was going home.
Q. How do you know that?
A. Because the talk -- well, you'll be able to rejoin your family soon. Are you happy? Will you be glad to be able to eat bread? Do you think your family will recognize you? Things like that.

Q. After the second release, did you have any conversation with your captors?

A. Well, I started to get a little concerned. I didn't know what process they were going through and what preparation. They were telling people they were going home, but I didn't see anything changing here.

Q. For you, or for anyone else?

A. For me. The daily routine was still the same. Actually, nothing changed at all. No one came to talk to me, no new clothes, there was no hair cut, there was nothing.

Q. Did you talk to any of your captors about that?

A. Yes.

Q. Who did you talk to?

A. I talked to the political officer about that.

Q. Would that have been Dong, or Khuong?

A. Khuong, or Sy.

Q. What did Sy -- strike that. Off the record.

[Discussion off the record.]

[Recess.]

BY MR. CODINHA:

Q. Okay, Mr. Garwood, we're resuming your deposition
now. We're back on the record. I think I broke off by asking you in the conversations you had with your captors about you not going back, I think it was the second group of people, you said you began being concerned for the homecoming group.

A. Yes.

Q. What were you told?

A. They didn't tell me anything. They hadn't been advised -- they claimed they hadn't been advised. They didn't know what the status was. Well, after the third group went home I was still there. I requested repeatedly to see, according to the radio, that everybody went home.

So I kept trying to find out why, what was going on, propaganda -- was there a fourth release, a fourth group, what? -- and I didn't become -- I was strong, but I wasn't very forceful about it until after the third release, and I was up on the hill gathering wood again a couple of times after that, and I didn't see any more Americans at this camp, other than myself, and I got a little upset about it. It was kind of like they were all gone. It was kind of looking all vacant and there wasn't much activity going on over there.

Q. When was this?

A. Approximately October, maybe. Approximately fall.

Q. Fall of '73?

A. Yes. Well, my immediate thought was that, not that they had been moved, but that these people had been turned
Q. Tell me what you observed about Americans.
A. Just, they reappeared again. I don't know if they were the same people. I don't know if they were the same people that were there or not.
Q. When did you first see them? Well, strike that. Where did you see them?
A. The same compound as the people before.
Q. The little cement buildings that you described.
A. Yes, cement structures -- yes.
Q. How did you come about that you saw --
A. The same circumstances of gathering wood.
Q. You were up gathering wood.
A. Yes, and after, when they were removed, I used to -- if I was up gathering wood I used to sit up there and just kind of daydream and look at the little buildings. Actually, I was quite envious, thinking that if the people were home -- kind of daydreaming, I guess. Yes, daydreaming -- yes.
Q. Then at a certain point, you say in late '73 or early '74 -- around Tet, either just before or just after Tet -- you saw that portion of the camp of Bat Bat repopulated.
A. Yes.
Q. What did you see?
A. Five or six people. That was after this activity.

There was activity there again.

Q. Just to help me through this, some time after Operation Homecoming, after about April -- March or April -- there had been no activity in that portion of the camp where the Americans had been kept.

A. I didn’t notice any.

Q. You didn’t notice any.

A. There was some activity, but not there. I mean, the guards had been gone. There were weeds overgrown. There was no one managing it or tending to it, although there was still personnel. The military personnel were still there. You could see them coming and going and milling about.

Q. But you never saw any American prisoners from Operation Homecoming until sometime around Tet.

A. Yes.

Q. Was that unusual, that you wouldn’t see American prisoners?

A. No.

Q. Prior to Homecoming, if you were to climb the hill and look down, would you usually see American prisoners?

A. Well, the thing was, prior to Operation Homecoming I didn’t really look for them. There was just the knowledge that they were there. It was no big deal.

Q. After Homecoming, there was a period --
A. It was a big deal.

Q. There was a period of time when you didn't see anyone, you didn't see any Americans.

A. I looked for them. I purposely looked for them, if nothing more than the sake of sanity, that I wasn't the only one there.

Q. So sometime around Tet in late '73, early '74, you climbed the hill again. Were you alone?

A. No. I went up that hill about once a week.

Q. You climbed the hill and you looked down and you saw Americans. How do you know they were Americans?

A. Well, other than just caucasians --

Q. Well, first could you tell they were caucasians?

A. Yes. I never saw any black people or any other than caucasians.

Q. So in this camp you saw only caucasians.

A. Yes.

Q. How were they dressed?

A. A little different. Newer clothes. Same type, but new. They had another thing that was new, a piece of garment that I didn't have. It was kind of like the same color. It was blue, but it was like a jacket, but almost close to like our field jacket. That's kind of what it looked like from a distance with pockets and also just the -- near the buildings they were color-coordinated.
And it wasn't 'til -- I don't remember if it was once or twice -- other times. I think it was only about three times. Each time after that, it was like I only saw one or two people. I never seen a group of people that were there. I can't tell you exactly -- you know, the numbers. I come up with 20, 25 at Son Tay camp there. I came up with those numbers -- the only way those numbers could have been different is if they'd made that individual sleep in a different one each night. You know, played this type of game. And that's the only way that there might have been only 1 or 2 versus 20 or 25 people there.

Q. Let me see if I understand. Sometime around Tet of 1974 is when you saw American POW's again?

A. Yes, approximately then. Yes.

Q. The first time you saw -- when you climbed the hill and saw them, how long a time did you get to look at them -- the first time?

A. I couldn't see them that well. It looked like they were cleaning out the building. I was trying to figure out, you know, what kind of bed -- they must have had a cement bed in there. I couldn't figure out how they got a bed in there. It didn't look big enough for a bed to lay down in.

I didn't focus too much. You know, that's the problem. I didn't focus too much upon the people themselves. It was more as to what they were doing and trying to figure
out how many were down there.

Something I think I should clarify, that the guards, the questions about guards and stuff -- if there had been no guards in the camp at all, nobody would have left the camp for the mere fact where we were at.

Q. You mean, in central Vietnam?
A. North Vietnam. Yes. You can't escape. You're going to escape to where? I mean, it's immediate death if you're caught outside the perimeter. And the guards didn't really need guns. I don't know why they had guns, but they did.

Q. Let me focus again --
A. But I paid more attention to that than to -- I wasn't on any intelligence gathering. Hell, I didn't even know if I'd get out of there. I actually paid more attention to the construction than to the individual. The only attention I paid to the individual was basically as to what kind of health and what type of environment the individual was in, to try to compare it to mine.

Q. Okay. Tell me about their health. What kind of health did you observe?
A. They looked pretty much comparable to mine. My health, I guess I kind of considered my health as not being real poor but not being real good. It kind of bordered on the brink. It was healthy enough that I wasn't catching every
AFTERNOON SESSION

(5:19 p.m.)

MR. CODINHA: Why don't we go back onto the record.

Whereupon,

ROBERT GARWOOD,

the witness on the stand at the time of recess, having been
previously duly sworn, was further examined and testified as
follows:

FURTHER EXAMINATION BY COUNSEL FOR THE COMMITTEE

BY MR. CODINHA:

Q. When we broke off, we were talking about the
occasion in Bat Bat Prison when you had seen some Americans,
which was either just before or just after Tet, in 1974.

And you had described -- you had given some detail
of what they looked like and why you thought they were
Caucasians, and whatever descriptions. You said some of them
had slight beard versus long beard. Some of them on their
hair -- you said almost all their hair was receding. You
noticed their builds. Some of the them were square versus
tall and lanky. You noticed some had big faces, some had
little faces. And you said you were not ever able to get
close enough that you could tell eye color. I'm sort of
trying to get you back to where we stopped. Okay?

A. I understand. Basically, my conclusions about these
individuals is that they were Americans. It was a time and
place, the camp administration, my knowledge of the camp in itself, as myself being incarcerated there, and them basically obeying the orders or the directives from the guards. It just came without a doubt that these people were none other than in a prisoner status.

I had no way of knowing whether they were pilots, whether they were CIA or what. Other than there just wasn't really any -- I mean, their movements. I mean, I've been in enough prison camps up to this time and my -- it was not an instinct. I didn't -- I became to the point that I didn't have to go up and ask what state these people were from to know that these people were Americans incarcerated. Americans were the only ones, Europeans, that was involved in any type of conflict with Vietnam at that time.

Q. So, if I understand --
A. Now, it's possible they could have been Australian or whatever.

Q. That was my next question. So, what you were able to say is that they were Caucasians. They certainly weren't Vietnamese. They weren't an Oriental group.
A. No.

Q. Now, as far as knowing they were Americans, did you ever hear them talk?
A. No. Not in this camp.

Q. Not this group?
pretty much freely within the compound I was, but they
couldn't. I actually had more freedom it seemed, from what I
observed, than they did.

Q. And you described that there were four or five rows
of five --
A. Five. I'm pretty sure there's five, 'cause it was

Q. Five rows of five?
A. Yes. Five rows of five. Almost like a complete

Q. And from where you were, could you see all of the 25
units?
A. Yes. I was on top of the hill, yes.

Q. And so you were looking down?
A. Yes, I was looking down.

Q. And as you looked down, where would the guards be
located?
A. On the road, the main entrance to that camp. There
was always one guard at the gate. To the right, as I'm on the
hill looking down, to the right of the prison structures. To
the right where the barracks, where the cadre and everybody
else was, that's where that camp administration was.

Q. How far away was that?
A. Probably -- maybe 150, 200 feet from the --

Q. What buildings were over there?
Q. Was it raining or was it misty?
A. No, it was cold. Not misty. It was just cold.
Damp.
Q. Was there anything obstructing your view towards these individuals?
A. No, no. I was up high enough.
Q. So then, you were looking down at them.
A. Yes, I was looking down.
Q. After this occasion, and let me just refer to it as the Tet '74 occasion, just to give us a definition for it, after that time at Bat Bat, when, if ever, did you see POW's in that same area again at Bat Bat?
A. I don't remember. I don't recollect seeing them again. I wasn't allowed to go up there.
Q. I may be confused, because I thought I understood you to say earlier today, before we broke, that on one, two, or three occasions you saw people there, and you saw them coming out of different huts. You never saw more than two or three at a time, but that wasn't after Tet '74? And I'm not trying to confuse you, I'm just trying to understand.
A. It had to be pre-that. Because the reason I can remember that, and I have to use things that happened to me then, they moved me out of that camp into Ha Dong. And when they moved me to Ha Dong, I was incarcerated, I was at Ha Dong -- Ha Dong is spelled H-a D-o-n-g. I was incarcerated there...
Q. What was the conversation you had indirectly with your guards about the prisoners?

A. They were comparing me to an individual which they called, they named him by his name, was Jim, who they claimed he was from California. And they wanted to know if I knew him. I guess they thought California was like one of their villages. I don't know. They didn't understand the size of California.

I asked them what his last name was and they said they didn't know his last name. He was Jim from California, had blue eyes. And I said: I need more information than that.

Anyway, whatever resulted from that, whoever said what, I got a visit from the political officer and he interrogated me for over an hour as to what, if anything, I heard the guards discussing, anything about anybody, names, about the rest of the camp, the goings-on in the rest of the camp or anything.

Basically, I was protecting the guards and I said no. He asked me what I was doing up on top of the hill. I told him foraging for wood. He asked me what I observed when I was up there. I said nothing, I didn't observe anything.

He never believed me, but basically the guards were at that point, those guards especially, they were young, they had always been pretty decent to me, and I didn't want to get
them into any trouble. And I knew that if I had said anything
that they probably had breached whatever rules and
regulations.

So I just, I said, no, I never heard anything; they
don't discuss anything with me; I don't ask them any
questions, they don't tell me anything.

Q. Did this conversation that you have just described
happening with the political officer happen after Operation
Homecoming?

A. Yes.

Q. Was it after you had seen the people in the camp
down below?

A. Yes.

Q. Can you put a time on it?

A. That's rough.

Q. Just your best estimate.

A. It was a very short period of time after I saw that.

What evidently had happened is one of the guards in the other
camp had saw me.

Q. How do you know that?

A. It was because everything tightened up after that,
and then the political officer. And I think the only reason
the guards discussed with me what they did is because what
they were supposed to -- or the order was to keep it secret
from me. They figured, well, he's already seen it, it's no
longer a secret, and they didn’t foresee any problem. I guess they didn’t see the importance of it. You know, what’s the big deal? They were young.

Q. Now, the political officer --
A. I didn’t see the importance of it, either.

Q. The political officer that talked to you, was that --
A. Khuong, that was Pham Sy Khuong.

Q. So Sy?
A. Yes. He would ask me. The guards were right there and certain questions he would ask me in English so the guards couldn’t understand, and he asked me to respond in English. And actually, I didn’t respond in English. He asked me the questions in English and I had difficulty understanding English.

He was fluent in English, but he was speaking it with a very heavy accent and that compounded the problem. So I’d end up, it was much easier and automatic for me to respond to him in Vietnamese, and by doing so it kind of frustrated him, but also at the same time it kind of relaxed the guards.

Q. Now, do you remember the names of those guards that were present who asked you about Jim, the American from California?
A. Yes, Dung and Thinh. "Dung" is spelled D, but pronounced as a "Y", u-n-g. And "Thinh" is spelled T-h-i-n-
Thinh. Dung was a corporal and Thinh was a sergeant. They were both from North Vietnam.

To make things maybe possibly a little easier, Dung took a wife who was a local native right there in Bat Bat.

Q. Do you know anything more about how we would locate him?

A. I would imagine that he would probably, unless he's still in the military, I would imagine, it's tradition that he could be located through this girl's family.

Q. Do you know her name?

A. No. The women never came down to the camp. We saw them occasionally, but from a distance, but they didn't come into the camp.

Q. How do you know that he took a wife from that local area?

A. Oh, they made a big deal of it. He boasted. He was very happy. It was a big thing.

Q. What did he look like physically, besides being Vietnamese?

A. He could have been an athlete very easily.

Q. This is the sergeant, Dung?

A. Dung, yes. Yes, he could have been an athlete very easily.

Q. He was muscular?

A. Yes. Not tall, not short. Probably what, 5'-8, 5'-
(Discussion off the record.)

MR. CODINHA: Why do you not mark this as the next exhibit, No. 5.

(The document referred to was marked Garwood Exhibit No. 5 for identification.)

BY MR. CODINHA:

Q. What is Exhibit No. 5?
A. You're asking me?
Q. Yes, it's your list.
A. It's a list of names that I could remember, that was passed, discussed by the guards, or people that I was compared to.
Q. If you would just read Exhibit No. 5 -- is this in your handwriting?
A. Yes, it is.
Q. When did you create this list?
A. Well, this list here.
Q. This one.
A. Within the last month.
Q. Would you just read from the top to the bottom down the list?
Q. Now, at first you said there were about five names.
Is it five or six names?

A. Six.

Q. Six names from the time you were at Bat Bat.

A. Yes.

Q. That you knew.

A. Let me clarify this. A couple of these names I didn't learn until Yen Bai, and I wrote Yen Bai, Son Tay as to the location. So I can narrow down as to the area where these people were supposed to have been incarcerated. That was the best that I can remember what was told to me.

Q. If I understand what you have said so far, between March and -- I am sorry, between Tet 1974 and March of 1974 when you left Bat Bat, you believe you were compared to five Americans, five other Americans.

A. No, no that's incorrect.

Q. Then tell me what I have stated that is wrong.

A. Not while I was at Bat Bat, this was approximately five Americans. From the time right after that sighting, after Operation Homecoming, and up until the time that I was transferred to Yen Bai prison camp.

Q. So, that would have included your time at Bat Bat.

A. And Ha Dong.

Q. And your time at Ha Dong.

A. That's correct.

Q. Were you able to determine how many others were at
Bat Bat, that you were compared with?

A. No, no. I never knew whether they were talking about the same individual in different conversations or not.

Q. But you were compared to other Americans while you were at Bat Bat, between Tet 1974 and March of 1974. Is that accurate?

A. Yes, I only remember one occasion that sticks out in my mind, and that's this Jim character.

Q. What more did they tell you about Jim, except he was from California? It is Jim, he was from California, what color was his hair, did they mention that?

A. Blond hair, blue eyes.

Q. He had blond hair and blue eyes. What else did they tell you about him?

A. He couldn't speak Vietnamese.

Q. What else could they tell you about him?

A. He didn't like fish sauce.

Q. Do you recall anything else that they told you about him?

A. He was always getting sick. Basically, they just compared our health, my health to his health, the way my body was able to adapt to the environment and his wasn't. His skin was much whiter, they said his skin was much whiter than mine. Longer hair.

Q. How long was your hair at that time?
A. Shoulder length.

Q. What else did they tell you about him?

A. He's from the village of California.

Q. They said the village of California.

A. Yes, Lang California, Lang California is village, translates as village. They didn't understand the United States. I think that they thought that the United States was set up kind of like Vietnam, provinces, villages, et cetera.

Q. Can you recall anything else they told you about Jim from California?

A. That pretty much got on the subject, because they were most basically interested. I told them I was from California, and they had evidently been talking to this individual, or found out that this individual was from California, and they figured Vietnam, from the same village, and people grew up together, you know each other. And I think that's what they thought, and that's the only reason they brought it up, and I told them no.

Q. When had you told these two guards that you were from California?

A. That was in my initial debriefing interrogation when I arrived in Bat Bat prison camp.

Q. When did they first tell you about Jim from California?

A. Just prior to when I was transferred to Ha Dong.
A. American.

Q. So you said you were Robert Garwood.

A. Yes.

Q. Did you say it in English?

A. Yes, I did.

Q. And where did you say you were from?

A. California. I told them that my parents were dead and I told them I had a sister, I still had a sister and that was it. That through this conversation, before this thing ever got started, they complained to Lieutenant Colonel Xuan that my English was very bad. They said, his Vietnamese is very good. His English is very bad.

So when they started off, they had some idioms, some slang American words, that they wanted me to define and I had no idea the meaning. I'd never heard of them before.

Q. Like what? Do you remember?

A. Shazam, one was shazam. I don't know that. I never heard of it. I didn't find that out when I got back and watched Gomer Pyle. I didn't know what it meant. It was words like that.

And it was words that myself, since I've been back, I've learned. That there was a lot of this slang that was used among the hippie groups that still today, I don't know what the full meaning of it was.

Q. During the March '74 through October '74 time that
you were at Hadong, did you have occasion to see any American prisoners?

A. At Hadong, no. But I did learn that that was the very exact same place that John Sweeney was incarcerated before his release. The way I learned that it because he carved his name on the bed. I didn't even know who he was.

Q. Do you know now who John Sweeney is?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Who's John Sweeney?

A. He's a marine that fell into Communist hands, lost on patrol, whatever, in Quan Tri. Was taken to North Vietnam and he supposedly, from what I understand, he told them he picked up one of their flyers. When he got lost on patrol, he threw away his weapon or whatever, buried it or something, and picked up one of their flyers and told them that he had crossed over.

They brought him to Hanoi and tried to run a check on him or something. But anyway, they held him in this facility here and held some type of big press conference in Hanoi and released him through Russia to Sweden, I believe. I think it was Sweden, whereas his family came from the U.S. and brought him back.

He was charged, there were charges brought against him. And due to whatever political reasons, the charges were dropped and he was discharged. The last I heard of John
Sweeney was that he was working as a security guard for the U.N.

Q. When did you learn about John Sweeney, all you've just described to me? Did you learn that in Vietnam?
A. Part of it.

Q. What did you learn in Vietnam?
A. Not the rest.

Q. What part did you learn in Vietnam?
A. The part I learned in Vietnam is that he went to Russia.

Q. Who told you that?
A. Xuan.

Q. I'm sorry.
A. Xuan. He told me who he was. He told me he was a Marine.

Q. Xuan. Oh, Xuan.
A. Because when I saw the name, I asked about him.

Q. Where did you see his name?
A. It was carved by some type of sharp instrument over another on the same bed that I was sleeping on.

Q. That you were sleeping on?
A. Yeah.

Q. Were there other names carved on that bed?
A. No. I didn't see any.

Q. How often did you see Lieutenant Colonel Xuan during
this period when you were in Hadong?
A. About once a week.
Q. For the entire 6 months?
A. Yeah, approximately, sometimes 2 weeks go by.
Q. Now during this time period in Hadong, you saw no other Americans. That’s March ’74 through October ’74. Is that accurate?
A. That’s accurate.
Q. Did you hear other Americans during that time period while you were in Hadong?
A. Not directly. They weren’t referred to as Americans. Thai, they were referred to as Europeans. I just assumed they were Americas.
Q. What did you hear about other Caucasians while you were at Hadong?
A. That there was a massive tuck movement of, transfer of Europeans from South to up in Cao Bang and it was then partially by truck and by railroad.
Q. Who told you that?
A. Nobody told me that. I overheard the guards talking.
Q. Did you know the guard who was making those statements?
A. No, these guards, they rotated. They changed them about once a week, the three of them.
Q. How many times did you hear references to the massive transfer of Europeans?

A. I only remember the one instance. They didn’t refer to it, they just -- that’s what the word they used was, Europeans. But it was all done at night, in secrecy in trucks, covered trucks, and I didn’t hear any numbers.

Thang is also a derogatory word in Vietnamese. It’s not a complimentary word.

Q. How do you spell that?

A. T-h-a-n-g.

Q. That’s die?

A. Thang.

Q. That’s thai.

A. Thai. It’s t-h-a-i, but there’s a different symbol. It’s not the same as Colonel Thai. It’s a different pronunciation.

Q. Tell me the circumstances under which you heard about the Europeans being transferred.

A. The guards just talking to one another, a quite night. I just heard them talking. I was laying down in my bunk.

Q. When in terms of time? You arrived in March of ’74 and you left in October of ’74. When would this have happened?

A. I don’t remember that.
Q. Was it nearer to when you first arrived, was it nearer to when the school was set up, or was it nearer the end?
A. After, it was after the school incident.
Q. So the school incident happened within 2 weeks of your first arrival.
A. Approximately about 2 or 3 weeks, yes.
Q. Was it close to when you were transferred back to Bat Bat?
A. I don’t remember that.
Q. How did it come that you left Hadong?
A. They did the same trick as when they brought me there.
Q. Who did the same trick?
A. Xuan, Sy, and the guard. Well, just Xuan, Sy and the driver, the jeep driver, they come, got me the same way, and transported me back. I didn’t even know, I kind of got, felt a sense of direction, I kind of figured I was going back there, but I wasn’t sure until I got close to Bat Bat and familiar surroundings, then I knew I was coming back.
Q. How close to Bat Bat were you before you recognized any of the surroundings?
A. There’s a big lake, the lake at Bat Bat. When I got to the lake at Bat Bat, then I knew.
Q. This was during the middle of the night, how could
you see the lake?

A. You have to understand the hills, the mountains, the roads. The roads, they always built them the laziest way to go. Any flat lands were eaten up by rice paddies, so the roads, naturally, had to be built and cut out of the hills and the mountains. So from high points to low points, it was clear up there, it’s crystal clear at night. You can develop night vision and you can see people walking.

Q. Did you have any conversation with Xuan or Sy on the way back to Bat Bat?

A. No, I didn’t even know I was going back there.

Q. Did you know why you were being returned?

A. I thought it was due to the failure of whatever they took me there for, the school or whatever, what they planned to do, it didn’t work out. And I probably became a security problem there in Hadong, so they brought me back to Bat Bat.
DEPOSITION OF ROBERT GARWOOD

Wednesday, January 22, 1992

U.S. Senate
Select Committee on
POW/MIA Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Continued deposition of ROBERT GARWOOD, a witness herein, called for further examination by counsel for the
Select Committee, pursuant to notice, the witness having been
duly previously sworn by RAYMOND R. HEER, a Notary Public in
and for the District of Columbia, taken at the office of Hon.
Robert D. Smith, Room SD-332, Dirksen Senate Office Building,
commencing at 9:40 a.m., and the proceedings being taken down
by Stenomask by RAYMOND R. HEER, and transcribed under his
direction.

PRESENT:

HON. ROBERT C. SMITH

U.S. Senator from New Hampshire
APPEARANCES:

On behalf of the Committee:

J. WILLIAM CODINHA, ESQ., Chief Counsel
DINO CARLUCCIO, Staff of Senator Smith

On behalf of the Witness:

VAUGHAN E. TAYLOR, ESQ.
Taylor, Dowell and Horbaly
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Examination by Counsel for the

ROBERT GARWOOD Committee

By Mr. Codinha

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PROCEEDINGS

Whereupon,

ROBERT GARWOOD

was called as a witness by counsel for the committee and, having been duly previously sworn by the Notary Public, was further examined and testified as follows:

CONTINUED EXAMINATION

BY MR. CODINHA:

Q. Let's go back on the record. Good morning, Mr. Garwood. I remind you you are still under oath from yesterday, and we are resuming again your testimony hopefully from where we left off, but we will actually see, if we go back over anything now as I told you I would do after breaks, we have now had a night since you testified. Are there any changes, or have you thought of anything about the questions that I asked you yesterday that you would like to change, alter, add to, or make any variation just about the subject matters I asked you yesterday?

A. To be quite honest, I haven't really thought about what I testified to yesterday, only as what I can remember in any more detail of what I'm about to testify to, actually.

Q. As I explained to you, you'll have an opportunity to read the hard copy transcript that is created here. It may cause you to remember things, or you may want to add things, and it will have a jurat page which your attorney will explain
to you is an opportunity for you to make changes.

A. As I expressed yesterday, because of the time lapse the events are still pretty clear in my mind. The only things that are kind of shady is dates, and some names.

Q. I would like to resume. We were -- when we broke yesterday we had, I believe, just about completed your time at Ha Dong, H-a D-o-n-g, which you had told me was between March of '74 and October of '74. Do you recall that?

A. Yes.

Q. And I think we determined, and I will try to reconstruct what you said yesterday, that while you were at Ha Dong you did not see any other American POW's.

A. No, only the one name that was carved on the bed.

Q. You saw a name, and that was John W. Sweeney.

A. That's correct.

Q. But you saw no live Americans.

A. No.

Q. You heard no live Americans. You didn’t hear any voices that you recognized to be American.

A. No.

Q. And you had no contact with Americans during that period of time, March '74 through October of '74.

A. No.

Q. Did you have any conversation with your guards about live Americans during that period of time, if you recall?
A. No, just occasionally in the night when they were talking they would not use the word American, or in Vietnamese Thang My.

Q. Would you spell that for the stenographer?

A. T-h-a-n-g M-y. They would use the word Thang Thai, T-h-a-n-g T-h-a-i, using that phrase as a derogatory phrase. In the Vietnamese language, it is not a polite phrase referring to Europeans, and they would come -- in discussing prisoners they often used that phrase. I caught bits and pieces of conversations.

Most of the discussion was the trouble, how they talked about how boring it was, the duty of guarding these people as well as me, myself. They didn't see any reason. They have problem defining the reason why that they should have to guard me, that they should have to guard these other people because they said where are they going to escape to? There is no way that these people can escape. Even if you turn them loose in a field they stand out like a sore thumb.

Q. The guards' use of the term -- and you will forgive me -- Thang Thai, that was different than how they referred to you, wasn't it?

A. Yes, to my face in front of me, but in talking amongst themselves that was the way they referred to me.

Q. So you had heard yourself referred to as Thang Thai.

A. Yes.
Q. And you will again forgive my Vietnamese.

A. Actually, I considered that more of a compliment than anything because of the other phrases they used to use in referring to me, and so actually that phrase didn’t bother me as much as a lot of the other phrases.

Q. The term, Thang My.

A. Thang My, that didn’t bother me too much. It is a derogatory term.

Q. But Thang My is an American, isn’t it, and can you give us a literal translation of each, Thang My and Thang Thai?

A. That would be the same as calling a Mexican a WOP, or --

Q. Calling a Mexican a WOP.

A. Or an Italian a WOP, that type of phrase.

Q. Okay, then I think the point is made. If you called a Spaniard a Spick.

A. Right.

Q. That would be --

A. Derogatory.

Q. Then that’s derogatory, but it would have referred to a Spaniard.

A. Yes.

Q. And if you called an American Thang My, now that’s what I’m trying to determine.
A. They are pretty similar. The only difference is Thang My, you're -- and Thang Thai is derogatory, but to a European. Thang My is still the same derogatory statement, but specific to an American. My is American.

Q. What I'm trying to determine now is when the Vietnamese guards during this October '74 -- I'm sorry, March '74 through October '74 time frame were talking about the other prisoners they were guarding, I think I'm clear that they were using Thang Thai.

A. Yes.

Q. They weren't saying Thang My.

A. No, not that I can remember.

Q. Now, you've also said they sometimes referred to you as Thang Thai.

A. Yes.

Q. How often would have occur when you would hear them talking about you?

A. Only when they would compare me to other people.

Q. And did that happen during this March through -- March '74 through October '74 time period?

A. Yes. Actually, it was quite often. I seemed to be less trouble than the other people.

Q. As much as you can recall, tell me the comparisons that were made that you recall during this time period between you and the other prisoners they were guarding.
A. It would be much easier if I could speak Vietnamese, so I have to translate.

Q. I perfectly understand. No one here speaks Vietnamese today.

A. This European is much easier to handle because of his characteristics in Vietnamese in understanding the language. He follows orders. It is easier to direct, to give orders, because of his ability to understand Vietnamese and the Vietnamese customs, whereas the other Europeans are very stubborn and belligerent.

Q. Did you have any sense of how many other Europeans your guards were talking about?

A. No. I never heard numbers.

Q. Okay, but I'm not asking really for numbers now, I'm really asking if you had any sense, did it seem like they were talking about a lot of people?

A. More than one, yes.

Q. More than one, but you weren't able to determine?

A. No.

Q. Were you able to determine from the tone of the conversation, and I'm not sure that Vietnamese -- I'm not sure about the tenses they use in Vietnamese, but were you able to determine from the grammar that was used in Vietnamese whether they were talking about present time experience or past time experience?
A. Present time.

Q. So in Vietnamese you have a present tense, a past tense, a future tense.

A. Yes. Well, you have -- and it basically in the plural or the future or the past, it depends on how not only the tone, but how it is phrased in a sentence. It's easily distinguishable as whether they're talking about several years ago or talking about the French -- when they talked about the French, it was very easy when they talked about the French, because they always used the word Thang Phap. They always use French Thang Phap, and in --

Q. Would you spell Thang Phap, please?

A. T-h-a-n-g P-h-a-p. They -- when referring to Americans or about Americans there was a very strong -- a bitterness in their voice, almost a hatred. Anything referring to an American, they blamed America and Americans for all their troubles.

Everything bad that has ever happened to Vietnam they blamed it on the Americans. They blamed America for French involvement in Vietnam and France's domination. They claimed it was U.S.-backed money, forces, intelligence, et cetera. Everything bad that happened to Vietnam over the last century was because of the United States.

Q. With respect to the time period between March of '74 and October of '74, your period in Ha Dong, what tense were
the guards using when they referred to other prisoners they
were guarding?

A. The present tense.

Q. Did you interpret that to mean that it was something
that was happening as they were speaking, that it was
happening right around that time?

A. Yes. Yes, I did.

Q. Would they have used a different tense -- strike
that. Would the language have been different if they were
talking about something that had happened in the past, such as
before Homecoming?

A. Yes. The language would have been different.

Q. What can you remember about the language that they
used before that would have told you that?

A. Again, it would be easier if I could speak
Vietnamese.

(Discussion off the record.)

THE WITNESS: It's so easy to explain it in
Vietnamese. When talking about -- in Vietnamese when talking
about the weather or people or events there are phrases in the
Vietnamese language which is immediate. Immediately you
understand that it is something that has just happened or
about to happen, all right, without directly saying that it
happened yesterday, Tuesday, Friday -- whatever -- versus now
something happened 3 weeks ago or 6 months ago or a year ago.
Well, they would literally say a few months ago, or last year, or et cetera, where anything that was present they wouldn't. Sometimes they would use a yesterday or tomorrow or last week, but not ordinarily. Only if something specific, but when speaking overall of an overall comparison it was just -- it was like the person, if the person you were speaking to, it was common knowledge to that individual, then you just speak directly and it would be in the present tense, and not put a date or anything to it.

Almost like -- if it was comparing me to you it would be like both the parties exchanging the conversation. To compare me to you it would be almost like you were sitting in the same room and it was knowledgeable. They didn't come out and say well, you're sitting in the same room I am. It just would be, it is distinguishable in Vietnamese to know whether or not -- at times I even thought maybe that there was a camp even near the one I was in.

BY MR. CODINHA:

Q. What made you believe that?
A. Because occasionally when they arrived and the guards changed they came in on bicycles instead of jeep or truck.

Q. And you think -- when you say a camp, are you referring to an American POW camp?
A. I don't want to put a label on it because I don't