

12.13.68

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(1340)

On December 13, 1968, a C-123K (Case 1340) collided in mid-air with a B-57E (Case 1341). The aircraft wreckage crashed into an area approximately 47 kilometers northwest of the town of Tchepone, Savannakhet Province, three kilometers east of Route 411 and in the area of Ban Kok Nak. The C-123 pilot, First Lieutenant Thomas H. Turner, exited through the cockpit window after finding the co-pilot's seat empty and fire coming into the cockpit from the fuselage. He later reported that there had been an explosion in the aft section of the aircraft and the C-123K had gone out of control. After parachuting from the cockpit window, Lieutenant Turner noted that there was another parachute below his and he believed it might have belonged to a member of the two-man B-57E crew. Lieutenant Turner was rescued on December 13th and all other crewmen from the two aircrews were declared missing.

Returning U.S. POWs had no information on the fate of the two aircrews. After Operation Homecoming they were eventually declared killed, body not recovered, based on a presumptive finding of death.

From 1968 through 1971, the next of kin of Lieutenant Donahue tried unsuccessfully to obtain information about him from Lao communist officials. Reward notices were circulated in Thailand in the late 1970s which promised money and resettlement into the U.S. for information about Lieutenant Donahue. During 1980, information attributed to former Royal Lao Army Region II Commander, General Vang Pao, asserted that U.S. POWs had been moved from North Vietnam to Sam Neua, Laos, and then to the area of Kham Keut, Khammouane Province. These and other reports in a similar vein, eventually leading to assertions that Morgan Jefferson Donahue was still alive and simultaneously a prisoner in either Khammouane Province or Houa Phan Province, Laos and Binh Tri Thien Province, Vietnam, were determined by DIA to be fabrications.

In 1980 the DIA Director, Lieutenant General Eugene Tighe, initiated an effort which prevented the release of all POW/MIA intelligence reports received at that agency after August 1979. While due in part to a concern that the release of such reports might hazard any U.S. POWs still alive in Southeast, this policy coincided with efforts by some next of kin to have POW/MIA reports released so they could be entered into military service casualty board case reviews underway, including that of Captain Donahue. The Defense Department agreed to permit DIA to act as both initial and appellate review authority over such reports, effectively denying their release. Lieutenant Donahue was declared killed in action, body not recovered, in February 1981.

However, these earliest accounts led by 1981 to either funding by the U.S. Army's Intelligence and Security Command and National League of Families senior officials for, or involvement by senior Defense Department officials in, covert cross border forays by elements of the so-called Lao resistance operating from Thailand into Laos and may also have involved the so-called Vietnamese resistance. Such reports of live Americans in Khammouane and

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elsewhere were determined by DIA by 1987 to have been the result of an active measures disinformation program by the state security apparatus of Laos and Vietnam which achieved various objectives, including manipulation of the POW/MIA issue. Such hostile intelligence efforts had directly targeted the Lao neutralist faction as a conduit for the disinformation. DIA determined it was the neutralist groups and others in Thailand who had been, and still continue to be, conduits for hostile intelligence managed disinformation which eventually reaches private POW/MIA hunters and next of kin.

In 1982, a source reported information about a wartime crash of a C-130 in the area of this loss incident. Human remains were reportedly recovered and buried during the war. In 1986 the wreckage was located and the tail number determined to be that of the C-123K (Case 1340). In March 1990, Lao officials reported that civilians had recovered human remains from a B-57/C-123 crash site located on a karst in the area of this loss incident.