

# POWs said to have been abandoned in North Korea and Siberia

by Scott Thompson

On Nov. 10 and 11, 1992, the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs held hearings on the fate of prisoners of war and missing in action during World War II, the Korean War, and the Cold War. Overall, the hearings were remarkably low-key, verging on a coverup of the startling revelations that had been made by Lt. Col. Philip Corso, USA (ret.), who had served on the National Security Council staff under President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

At a press conference on Nov. 9, Colonel Corso admitted that it was deliberate policy to list as dead many of those American GIs who were known to have been captured by the North Koreans. Altogether, some 8,177 servicemen were unaccounted for from the Korean War.

Colonel Corso stressed that many U.S. soldiers captured in the Korean War were shipped to Russia: "I kept getting reports that some of our men were being shipped to Manchuria and then into the Soviet Union." He added: "I definitely know of two trainloads of American prisoners—about a thousand men—taken to China and then switched to Russian trains and shipped into Siberia. None of those boys ever came back."

To conceal the fate of the prisoners from the public, Colonel Corso said he suggested in 1955 that Eisenhower should declare the men dead, just as seems to have happened during the Vietnam War two decades later. "He [Eisenhower] said: 'I think you're right. I accept your recommendation.'"

Colonel Corso repeated elements of this confession in his Nov. 11 testimony to the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs. Participating in the coverup, Corso said, are "those journalists who wrapped themselves in the American flag and accepted money from the CIA to report the 'party line' to supplement their incomes." He added: "I recommended that the report [on the POWs shipped to Russia] not be made public because the POWs should be given up for dead since we knew the Soviets would never relinquish them." "Out of concern for the POWs' families, the President agreed," Corso told the committee.

Corso, who had said at his press conference that he knew definitely about two trainloads of POWs being shipped to Siberia, said there might have been a third trainload of about 450 POWs. At the press conference, Corso said: "The fate of our prisoners fell through the cracks. It wasn't an accident. It was policy."

## Covering up the policy

The remainder of the hearings, despite certain highlights such as new candor from the Russian side, served to obscure or diminish these revelations from Colonel Corso. This was particularly true of testimony from American members of the U.S.-Russian Joint Commission, including: Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Alan Ptak, whose office runs the executive secretariat of the U.S.-Russian Joint Commission; Ptak's hired consultant Paul Cole, a Rand Corporation researcher; and Charles Kartmann, the director of the Office of Korean Affairs. Cole threw cold water on the thesis that there are any significant number of unaccounted-for MIAs, let alone living POWs, from World War II and the Korean War. By his "war modeling analysis," a form of academic charlatany derived from systems analysis, Cole claimed that he had reduced the 8,177 who were unaccounted for in the Korean War to slightly less than 100.

Cole tried to maintain that eyewitness accounts from American servicemen, reporting that others had been left behind in Communist China when groups of soldiers were taken there to be interrogated, constituted merely "circumstantial evidence." However, when committee chairman Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.) pressed him, Cole was forced to admit that there were prisoners transferred from North Korea to China or the Soviet Union. "Yes, it occurred," Cole finally blurted out.

## Rolling a rock uphill

Despite this degree of obfuscation from administration officials charged with investigating the fate of POWs and MIAs, some senators tenaciously demanded the truth, especially Sen. Robert C. Smith (R-N.H.). In his opening remarks, Senator Smith described a report as follows:

"It's a document that shows in explicit detail a lot of research that the government of North Korea did not return a large number of American servicemen at the end of the war, and that some of the men left behind were sent to Communist China and to the Soviet Union. Internal documents and statements made at the time also show that our government believed that men were still kept alive in captivity and until only a few months ago had kept that reality from the American people. It has covered up what it knew through a pattern of denial, misleading statements, and, in some cases, lies,

and by doing so with regard to the Korean conflict, it broke its commitment with the people who put on the uniform to fight for the freedoms and protection that we and our allies enjoy today.”

In his opening remarks, Senator Kerry reminded the committee: “President Yeltsin has admitted that some Americans were imprisoned in the former Soviet Union after World War II. He has said that some U.S. prisoners were interrogated by the Soviets during the Korean War, and he has acknowledged the capture and imprisonment of perhaps a dozen airmen during the Cold War period.”

### General Volkogonov

The Russian co-chairman of the U.S.-Russian Joint Commission, Gen. Dmitri Volkogonov, Soviet Army (ret.), appeared before a panel of the Senate Select Committee on Nov. 11. He presented a marked contrast with his U.S. co-chairman, Amb. Malcolm Toon, who has made statements to the press suggesting that he does not believe American servicemen were ever held in the Soviet Union. Ironically, Ambassador Toon, who served as U.S. ambassador to Moscow under President Ronald Reagan, has actually demanded that the Russian government issue a statement to that effect, when, as far as the Russians are concerned, the investigation is still open. General Volkogonov, who holds near-cabinet rank as an adviser to President Boris Yeltsin, opened his remarks by reading a Nov. 5 statement from the Russian President, which says in part: “During the plenary meetings [of the U.S.-Russian Joint Commission] held in March, May, and September of this year, the U.S. side was given documents on American citizens who found themselves on the territory of the former U.S.S.R. in World War II and the Cold War period, and some documents that contained information on several U.S. citizens who had been taken prisoner during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The commission has found evidence of American citizens staying in camps and being summarily executed by the Stalin regime and, in a number of cases, of being forced to renounce their U.S. citizenship. Some of them still reside on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Their names and addresses have been identified and communicated to the U.S. side. A number of former U.S. citizens have stayed in Russia voluntarily after World War II and still reside here. Of course, in a democratic Russia, they have the right to decide their lives themselves. All their rights are fully guaranteed.

“As a result of the work done, one may conclude that today there are no American citizens held against their will on the territory of Russia. However, all the questions have not been fully answered. There are cases that still require additional examination. For my part, as Russia’s President, I express the hope that the Joint Russian-American Commission will continue its work and that it will be able to find answers to the outstanding questions.”

Particular highlights of the investigation to date in Russia



*Evidence continues to mount that live American POWs were simply declared dead. Some ended up in Russia. Here, U.S. soldiers on patrol 20 miles north of Saigon in 1965.*

brought up by General Volkogonov include:

- The files have been recovered from the interrogation by the Soviets of 49 American pilots, who were held prisoner with 3,000 others in camps near the Russian border, according to correspondence between Stalin and Chinese leader Zhou Enlai.

- At least nine U.S. defectors from the Vietnam War, with the agreement of the People’s Republic of China and Vietnam, were conveyed across Soviet territory for relocation mainly in Sweden, where they engaged in propaganda activity.

- Of the 22,000 Americans in camps liberated by the Soviets during World War II, some 119 were held by the Soviets because their names seemed to be Russian, Ukrainian, or Jewish. Stalin feared they might either be spies or collaborationists. Most were freed under pressure from the United States.

- At least six prisoners from the Korean War were held at special camps in the Soviet Union, and they were charged with being spies. Three were held for eight years, then shot. Of the others, they were either given back, died of natural causes, or else took Soviet citizenship.

- The archives of the Russian intelligence services show a significant number of Americans—including military and diplomatic personnel—who are residing of their own free will in Russia today.

General Volkogonov testified that he did not rule out that there had been mass transits of American Korean War servicemen to the U.S.S.R., but said that the records have yet to be located. He noted that his own father had been liquidated under Stalin, and he has still not found any record of the circumstances. But General Volkogonov said that a public climate is being created to support the release of POWs, as well as to help locate them, although he said that about half the Russian population is still resistant to this sort of inquiry.