

VIETNAM

SPS

Tan Son Nhut Air Base

8th Aerial Port, U.S. Navy

Missing *Inaction*

by Larry Mayes

1 Lt., USAF, RVN 1969-1970

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If I could Change One Thing...

I have been living an erie experience since my Vietnam tour of 1969-1970 and I would certainly *change one thing if I could....*

One of my duties as the 8th Aerial Port Night Duty Officer was to verify the human remains coming directly from the field to the large mortuary at Tân Sơn Nhứt-usually very fresh killed, in body bags. This verification was by checking the *Signature Hand Receipt* from the Loadmaster against the toe-tag on the body or dog tags (when available)--this was to insure the "chain of custody" on the human remains from the field all the way to the funeral home in USA.

We then reverified the remains a day or two later, once they had been processed at the mortuary and placed in the aluminum Transfer Case for shipment home--this verification was done by comparing the *Military Airlift Command Form 127, Signature Hand Receipt*, against the autopsy forms placed in a small cylindrical receptacle in the foot end of the Transfer Case.

In the fall of 1969 I verified the remains of a Tommy Leon C-----. His last name was the same as a Trooper who was serving with my brother on the South Dakota State Troopers, and the SSAN for the remains began with 503, which was a SD SSAN. I was both curious and saddened, so I wrote home to my brother to see if his fellow Trooper had lost a relative in SEA. In due time the reply was received and "yes" Trooper C----- had lost his cousin, shot down in the Fall of 1969.

That was end of story for a while, but during my Pentagon tour in 1984 I noticed a large POW/MIA display in the hallway listing Tommy Leon C----- as MIA. Since I had verified "his" remains as received and sent home to USA, this couldn't be correct. A check with my brother and Trooper C----- revealed they had never received a body and that Tommy was still considered MIA. From that day in 1984 'til today I have visited the Casualty Affairs office at Randolph AFB and looked at Tommy's case file on several occasions; I have discussed his MIA status with the Central Identification Lab in Hawaii and even had the commander of the lab, a fellow classmate of mine from the Army War College, look at the records to ascertain how I could have "verified" the receipt of Tommy's remains in 1969, yet he is still MIA today. The crash site of Tommy's plane has been visited and excavated by the Joint Task Force Full Det-ing, and they have never recovered enough bones or other artifacts to declare Tommy or his back-seater as KIA.

If I could do something over again, it would be to have pursued through the mortuary or casualty folks at the time who that body really was. As it stands now, I have no idea who it was, nor do any of the many others I have discussed this case with. I will always wonder, and of course Tommy's family will, too. *Knowing what I know now*, which is uncertainty, I would never had discussed my part in the story with his family... now we are all left to ponder the



unknown....

Larry Mayes, 1 Lt., USAF, RVN 1969-1970

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