

McCain Said to Conceal Facts About POWs Left in Vietnam

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Senator John McCain, whose rise to the highest levels in politics is literally built on his POW experience in Vietnam, has “worked very hard to hide from the public stunning information about American prisoners in Vietnam who, unlike him, didn’t return home,” The Nation magazine disclosed.

“Throughout his Senate career, McCain has quietly sponsored and pushed into federal law a set of prohibitions that keep the most revealing information about these men buried as classified documents,” Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Sydney Schanberg charges in the October 6th issue of the liberal publication.

McCain has frequently berated as “MIA hobbyists” and “conspiracy theorists” those who claim American service personnel were left behind after the signing of the January, 1973, peace treaty that returned 591 men. But a large body of evidence suggests that “hundreds” of US prisoners held in Vietnam were, in fact, not returned, the magazine writer said.

“The sum of the secrets McCain has sought to hide is not small. There exists a telling mass of official documents, radio intercepts, witness depositions, satellite photos of rescue symbols that pilots were trained to use, electronic messages from the ground containing the individual code numbers given to airmen, a rescue mission by a Special Forces unit that was aborted twice by Washington and even sworn testimony by two defense secretaries (James Schlesinger and Melvin Laird) that ‘men were left behind,’” Schanberg writes.

Among the documents McCain has attempted to discredit is a transcript of North Vietnamese general Tran Van Quang briefing of the Hanoi Politburo discovered in Soviet archives. Four months before the peace treaty he said Hanoi was holding 1,205 American prisoners but would keep many as leverage to ensure getting reparations from Washington, Schanberg said.

Additionally, the Defense Intelligence Agency(DIA) received more than 1,600 firsthand reports of sightings of live American prisoners and nearly 14,000 second-hand accounts, Schanberg pointed out. “Many witnesses interrogated by CIA or Pentagon intelligence agents were deemed ‘credible’ in the agents’ reports. Some of the witnesses were given lie-detector tests and passed. Sources provided me with copies of these witness reports. Yet the DIA, after reviewing them all, concluded that they ‘do not constitute evidence’ that men were still alive,” Schanberg continued.

The author, who has worked as a reporter for the New York Times and other publications and has reported extensively on the POW story, said McCain opposed the 1990 Truth bill

that would compel department heads who got POW information to make it public. The following year, McCain introduced his own version of it that “created a bureaucratic maze from which only a fraction of the documents could emerge—only the records that revealed no POW secrets,” Schanberg said. The bill was enacted into law.

Again, McCain in 1996 attached a crippling amendment to the Missing Service Personnel Act that pulled its enforcement teeth, its criminal penalties, and reduced “the obligations of commanders in the field to speedily search for missing men and report the incidents to the Pentagon,” Schanberg said.

McCain is the most pivotal member of the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs—a committee that has become “part of the (Pentagon) debunking machine,” the author says.

Schanberg goes on to say “very few Americans are aware of McCain’s role not only in keeping the subject out of public view but in denying the existence of abandoned POWs.” He explained, “The Arizona senator has actually been following the lead of every White House since Richard Nixon’s and thus of every CIA director, Pentagon chief and National Security Adviser, among many others (including Dick Cheney, who was George H.W. Bush’s defense secretary.”

“The only explanation McCain has ever offered for his leadership on legislation that seals POW information is that he believes the release of such information would only stir up fresh grief for the families of those who were never accounted for in Vietnam,” Schanberg writes. But he adds, “Of the scores of POW families I’ve met over the years, only a few have said they want the books closed without knowing what happened to their men. All the rest say that not knowing is exactly what grieves them.”

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