

Subj: Griffiths Helped Fake Vietnam Unknown Soldier

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MIA Family Group Director Helped Pentagon Fake Vietnam Unknown Soldier

By Ted Sampley

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Callers to the National League of POW/MIA Families Hot Line on February 19, 1998, heard the following recorded message from the League's executive director, Ann Mills Griffiths, regarding the controversy surrounding the identification of the Unknown Soldier from the Vietnam War:

"On January 19th, CBS News ran a story asserting that officials in the Pentagon knew the identity of the Unknown Soldier from the Vietnam War interred at Arlington National Cemetery, claiming that the individual is Lt. Michael Blassie, USAF; unaccounted for in South Vietnam since May, 1972.

"Before the May 1984, ceremony that entombed the Vietnam War Unknown, the League and the leadership of the Reagan Administration were assured that the remains were not correlated to any missing American, were not identifiable, and interment would not preclude accountability for any missing American."

The phone message concluded:

"On January 24th, the League Board of Directors decided not to take any position until more facts are known. A high level review is now ongoing within the Defense Department."

The League's May 13 recording stated:

"The League is relieved that Secretary of Defense Cohen made the decision to disinter the Vietnam War Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. A brief ceremony will take place on May 14 at Arlington National Cemetery.

"Since the anonymity of this shrine had been violated by irresponsible CBS reporting, and since the U.S. Government had determined there is a reasonable possibility of identification using scientific technology that did not exist at the time of the interment in 1984, the League supported disinterment.

"Given the advances in identification technology now and in the future, the League strongly opposes any reinterment of remains in the Tomb, but recognizing the need to honor those who may never be accounted for, the League recommends that a plaque be formally dedicated at this site to honor those still missing and their noble sacrifices for our nation."

Those taped messages are proof that Ann Mills Griffiths is attempting to rewrite the history of her evil complicity in the events that led to the Pentagon's faking of the Vietnam Unknown Soldier.

This is but another example of how the League's "mistress of deceit" has for years either manipulated or allowed the manipulation of the POW/MIA issue for political purposes and gain.

While Griffiths did in 1982 initially object to the interment of a Vietnam Unknown as premature, she was even then deliberately withholding certain vital information from the family of Lt. Blassie, as well as the League's membership, and veterans organizations.

She never revealed that the MIA remains designated as X-26, which later became the Vietnam Unknown Soldier, was for eight years prior to 1980 known by the formal designation "Believed to Be" Michael Blassie.

Lt. Blassie's identity card along with other items was found with the X-26 remains and, according to CBS, at least three Americans saw the card.

With the shredding of records pertaining to not one but four sets of MIA remains at CIL-HI, in 1982, a mechanism was put in place that led to the manipulation of the designation process for the Unknown.

Veterans groups were courted for their support to entomb a Vietnam Unknown and Army officers lobbied Congress.

All of the Pentagon's manipulation, withholding of information, and shredding of records was conducted with the full knowledge of Griffiths.

By acts of omission and commission, Griffiths willfully misled her organization's membership, the leadership of national veterans groups as well as the American public. With silence she condoned the Pentagon's faking of the Vietnam Unknown.

In the early 1980's, the walls of the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (CIL-HI) must have and throbbed as they absorbed the whispered name of Lt. Michael J. Blassie.

Over a decade and a half later, the whispers were finally spoken out loud as two technicians who worked in the identification lab told CBS that they knew the X-26 remains were almost surely Lt. Blassie's and that their bosses knew it too.

One of the dirty secrets of the Vietnam War had been made public.

Would the veterans groups and congressional leaders have supported the decision to entomb a Vietnam Unknown had they known the potential for eventual identification?

Would they have supported the entombment if they had known the contents of a White House memo written, in 1982?

Look at those infamous events as related by Richard T. Childress, a

member of President Reagan's National Security Council.

In a memo dated August 26th, 1982 to William P. Clark, Childress, discusses the "Selection of a Vietnam Unknown."

Childress wrote the League of Families had pointed out "that identification of the remains in Hawaii was *still possible*, and minimal efforts had been made to obtain dental records from the Services or families, or follow-up with the Vietnamese. Further, they [the League] were aware that the Army had shredded copies of the records of the four remains, the originals forwarded to the Pentagon, thus preventing further correlation and identification by the Central Identification Lab. The League office also pointed out that continued public and Congressional lobbying under the circumstances would force them to inform the families, thus resulting in a major public controversy."

That proved to be an empty threat.

Griffiths continued to remain silent.

No POW/MIA family was ever made aware of the controversy surrounding the selection of the Vietnam Unknown. That information would not surface, in wide distribution, until 1994 when details identifying the Vietnam Unknown were published in the U.S. Veteran Dispatch.

Childress had worked hard in the early years to defuse a potentially dangerous and embarrassing situation. In a July 29, 1982 meeting of the POW/MIA Inter Agency Group, (IAG) of which Griffiths was a member, Childress offered a "compromise proposal which called for dedication of an empty vault with a plaque saying it was reserved for an unknown, with the hope that it would never be used."

All members of the IAG, Departments of State and Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Security Council and Griffiths, agreed to Childress's proposal.

However, his recommendations were "inexplicably" omitted from Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger's memo, drafted by Army Secretary Marsh.

Griffiths continued to maintain her silence.

Childress was elated. He bragged in a memo:

"At my urging on at least six occasions in the past month, Ann Griffiths has *not* gone public. She is under increasing pressure to do so, as Secretary Marsh's original memo is in the hand of the veterans groups. Jack Anderson [Washington Post columnist] has a copy and has called the League, and the Army flag officer has made the rounds to the veterans groups and Congress."

To understand exactly what Childress and Griffiths knew about the remains held at CIL-HI, go back to the Childress memo:

"The League [Griffiths] knows the full interment precedent, the state of identification on each set of remains, the fact that records have been

shredded and the propensity of the Army to push for early action. Should such facts go public, rather than 'heal the wounds' of Vietnam, they would be reopened; the accounting process would be undermined; the hard won trust built up with the POW/MIA families over the past would be jeopardized; and the credibility of the Central Identification Lab (which many families have visited) would be thrown into doubt.

"From 'bootleg' sources, I know that full maxillary dental structures exists on one of the two sets of remains currently in Hawaii and according to Lab personnel are identifiable if dental records from the Service or families are found. Further, the Lab has narrowed identification down to approximately 25 individuals. Due to the emphasis we have put on POW/MIA matters, the process of locating dental records is seriously under way for all 2,500 MIAs, but certainly not complete. The second set of remains mentioned consists of approximately 10% of a body, very charred, very fragmentary, and there has been no follow-up with the Vietnamese since 1978. This represents the full picture of the Lab's certifications of 'unidentifiable.'

"If the above facts were public, I am convinced that the support that is cited from Veteran's groups and Congress would melt quickly in the heat of public controversy. The groups' general comment that we should proceed as soon as PRACTICAL is a mandate of responsibility we need to discharge in the most conscientious fashion.

"My discussion with the League of Families convinces me that they would fully support interment of remains AFTER all efforts have been exhausted in the accounting and identification process to include aggressive follow-up with the Vietnamese to obtain further remains of the charred, fragmentary set and a complete search for dental records."

None of Childress's fears came to pass, because Griffiths never talked.

In April 1984, Secretary Casper Weinberger ordered the remains which had been designated X-26 and believed by many to be Lt. Michael J. Blassie placed in the Tomb of the Vietnam Unknown.

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