

COALITION OF FAMILIES OF KOREAN & COLD WAR POW/MIAS



Special Edition “We will find our own missing loved one by searching for them all, together.” Fall 2021

The Gulag Study⁽¹⁾

*Addressing the Question of Whether American POWs
Were Taken to the USSR and Not Returned*

What is Credible Evidence?

When we family members ask government officials about the so-called *Transfer Issue*, the oft-repeated over-view is that there is no 'credible' evidence that POWs were taken to the Soviet Union.

This verbiage likely comes down from high-on. It is difficult to understand how government policy makers could stand behind that position, given the massive amount of information to the contrary that exists. Making

that representation even more far-fetched is the fact that each of the five editions of *The Gulag Study*, published over the course of more than a decade, were authored by a talented and dedicated directorate within the Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

Each edition has analyzed numerous sightings and Intel Reports about American POWs having been taken to the Soviet Union during the Korean War. The first and

fifth editions—both of which are the subject of this article—state as a factual conclusion that American POWs were imprisoned in the Soviet Union. There might not be

widespread specific information as to which of our men were taken, but we know some of them were. Anyone who says otherwise is uninformed. Or avoiding the truth.

In the '93 Gulag Study (the 1st Edition), the Support

Directorate of the U.S./Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs concluded in its Executive Summary that American POWs⁽²⁾ were transferred to the Soviet Union and never repatriated as part of a highly secret Soviet MGB⁽³⁾ program to exploit and counter U.S. aircraft technologies. The program also used the POWs for general intelligence purposes, and possibly as lucrative hostages.

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(1) The Gulag Study is a series of reports by the Research and Analysis Division of DPAA/DPMO's US/Russia Joint Commission Support Directorate. DPMO is the predecessor of today's DPAA, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. (See Page 4)

(2) See the sidebar to this article for more information about the mission of the US/Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs and its U.S. Support Directorate, which authored all five editions of The Gulag Study.

(3) The MGB was the Soviet Ministry of State Security. It was one of the predecessor agencies of the KGB.

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Twelve years later, the Executive Summary of the Gulag Study's 5th Edition stated that American servicemen were imprisoned in the former Soviet Union, but that no definitive, verifiable information had been acquired that would allow the Directorate to determine the scope of such transfers or the fate of those who were taken. The Summary goes on to state that most reports lack the specificity to correlate them to individuals listed as missing and that, without greater access to Russian Secret Service and Military Intelligence officers and historical records, resolving questions raised by reports of American Servicemen in the Soviet Union will remain an elusive task.

In short, we have credible evidence. What we lack are details and cooperation from the Russians sufficient to answer the questions, "Which Americans were taken?" and "What became of them?"

Why did the Soviets want Americans?

Though, for the most part, the Studies don't address which specific men were taken, they do address other aspects of the issue. For example, why the Soviets wanted American servicemen. The Korean War was the first modern air war. It introduced new technologies that were electronics intensive. The technology depended on various advance support systems like air-intercept radar and airborne reconnaissance. The Soviets lagged behind the U.S. in its development of these new technologies and sought to close the gap by 'theft of design,' as the 1st Study put it. The Russian side of the U.S. Russia Joint Commission provided documents that show the Soviet 64th Fighter Aviation Corps had an unofficial mission during the Korean War: the management of overt and covert human intelligence which they targeted against the U.S. air forces.

The Soviets were particularly interested in the U.S. F-86 aircraft. The USAF ultimately determined that 666 of its air crew were missing and unaccounted for. The 1st Gulag Study states that, from an analysis of circumstances of their loss, several hundred of these airmen had survived their crashes and were candidates for transfer to the Soviet Union. To quote: "There is almost blatant evidence that this was, indeed, the case for a number of technically proficient, well-educated and highly skilled pilots of the F-86 Sabre Jet."

There was a policy to turn over pilots to the Soviets

According to the 1st Edition of the Gulag Study, the former head of a division-level POW collections team in the Chinese People's Volunteer Army testified about the existence of a policy to surrender American Pilots. Ac-

ording to the witness, his superior told him that "the Russians wanted the pilots." The witness admitted that he, personally, had turned over three pilots just north of the front lines between November of 1951 and March of 1952.

Another witness, a Russian General named Lobov, admitted in an interview that a special Soviet Air Force Unit was deployed with a mission to capture U.S. F-86 pilots alive by forcing them down. Reportedly, the Soviet pilots in this unit had to sign a secrecy statement.

The 1st Study also mentions the Soviet Sharashkas, which were separate prison camps in which individuals with technical, scientific, and other specialized skills were interned. Much of the Soviet focus at the time was on advancement of military capabilities, which made these camps likely destinations for many U.S. POWs.

But the Sharashkas were just one small part of a vast Soviet system of prisons, the GULAG, into which millions of people—including American POWs—were cast away for purposes of building or rebuilding the Soviet Union. Whether it be infrastructure or technical

capabilities, or political exploitation, the Soviets had no qualms about stealing people from their lives and depositing them into labor camps of one sort or another. It was no secret then and it is no secret now.

They would first question the men in North Korea on operational and tactical matters. Some of these men were then selected for transfer to the Soviet Union.

One source that is cited in the 1st Study is Retired Soviet Army Colonel Gavril Ivanovich Korotkov, who served as part of an analytical group that reported on developments in intelligence, both tactical and technical, that were learned from the war in Korea as it unfolded. According to Korotkov during a 1992 interview, Soviet military specialists were given approval to interrogate U.S. POWs. Some of the POWs were selected out for further interrogation, in the Soviet Union, based on criteria such as experience and seniority. Korotkov testified that the American POWs were transported mostly by rail, and that there were hundreds of them.

The Soviets were after not only the tactical and technical intelligence, but political Intel as well. According to Korotkov, the Soviet Ministry of State Security—the MGB—controlled the Americans, and interrogation reports were sent to various sectors of the Soviet intelligence apparatus. Which means information should exist in records of various Russian government agencies today.

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"The range of eyewitness testimony as to the presence of U.S. Korean War POWs in the GULAG is so broad and convincing that we cannot dismiss it."

From the 1993 (1st Edition) Gulag Study

The 1st Study cites other sources, some of which are American, all of which describe Soviet interaction with American POWs, as prisoners, most often within the Soviet Union. One report of note came from Captain Mel Giles of the Far East Command Group during the Korean War. In 1990, Giles reported that, during the war, in 1952, one of his agents had found out that 63 U.S. POWs were going to be shipped by truck and by rail to Chita in the Soviet Union. Giles maintained that the report was considered so credible that air strikes on the railway that would be carrying the POWs were cancelled by the U.S. command.

"The Soviets transferred several hundred U.S. Korean War POWs to the USSR and did not repatriate them."

From the 1st Gulag Study

In the 1st Study, the Support Directorate discusses the strengths and weaknesses of information known about several case studies. Thereafter, the Study's Summary concludes that the transfer of American POWs was, for the most part, "politically motivated, with the intent of holding them as political hostages, subjects for intelligence exploitation, and skilled labor within the camp system."

They changed American prisoners' names.

Following the case studies, the Directorate lays out all sorts of reports that came from within the Soviet Union. An interesting fact revealed by one witness helps explain the difficulty in tying reports to specific POWs. This witness claimed that foreigners were given Russian names. The source for this information reported that records of the name changes might still exist, most likely in Moscow. The question becomes, do the Russians have them and, if so, what will it take to get them to produce the information?

In addition to its reporting on the taking of American POWs, the 2005 Gulag Study delves into discussion of the various agencies involved in the Soviet Security and Intelligence System. It also highlights a number of the different camps within the Soviet GULAG. This information amounts to a valuable resource for research into the overall issue of the taking of Americans.

Both the 1st and the 5th Gulag Studies are replete with reports, sightings, and analysis of information, all of which lead to the inescapable conclusion that American POWs were taken from North Korea to the Soviet Union and never returned. The Studies tell us which Soviet agencies and offices were involved in this clandestine operation, where interrogations took place and what prison camps housed these prisoners. Myriad records exist...somewhere.

So, why, some seventy years later, is the truth still under wraps?

Where are the records? Likely, the Soviets feared retribution and the Russians today worry about political, economic, and other sorts of fallout. We get it. But that doesn't make continued lack of cooperation acceptable. And what about the U.S. government? Intel documents from Congress, the CIA, the military and even the white House, dating back to the war and going forward, demonstrate that our government knew men had been taken.

For seven decades, through numerous administrations, this tragedy has been housed in a dark corner of history. Russia has not produced records that would speak directly

to the program. Permission to reveal the truth would have to come from the highest ranks of the Russian government. Until that authority becomes a reality, the U.S. side of the Joint Commission can ask, discuss, and negotiate but how many records will they get that do more than dance around the issue?

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency handles remains recovery and identification, archival research, family outreach, and many other aspects of this labyrinth of unanswered questions. It makes a tremendous and much appreciated contribution to the accounting mission. But, the Transfer Issue—what do we hear about it? That there's no credible evidence men were taken.

For the most part, that's only if we ask. And, unless we push for more, that's all we get. To those of us who work the issue, it appears that a directive has come down from high up in the chain of command. DoD? State? The White House?(4) We don't know. It would be helpful if an appropriate government official would speak to this.

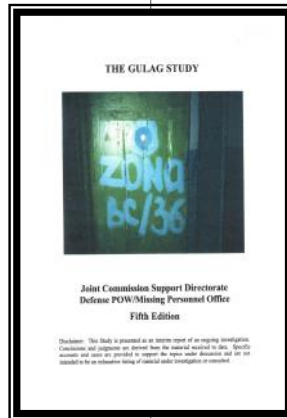
Regardless of the rhetoric, I believe the 'no credible evidence' claim is untrue. At best, it is misleading. My collection of documents alone shows otherwise, and I don't have a security clearance. So, why do officials keep repeating that mantra? We might not know which men were taken but we do have credible evidence that American POWs were transferred to the Soviet Union.

What's being done at the highest levels of our government to get the missing information? One would think our Presidents would have pounded their fists for answers. Why haven't we seen diplomatic, economic, or other sanctions? Alternatively, why not a promise of no retribution for the Russians? Make it a humanitarian issue. Distinguish between the Soviet Union and Russia. That was then. It's seventy years later. Unrelated politics have gotten in the way for too long.

Avoidance is the easy path to take. The abandoned men deserve so much more.

"Ultimately, it is persistence that will shape the outcome of this often frustrating, occasionally promising, and always daunting enterprise." Norm Kass, Former Executive Secretary for the U.S. side of the USRJC

(4) This list of U.S. government entities with knowledge that men were taken is not all-inclusive.



The US/Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs
(About the Gulag Studies)

*The US/Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs /USRJC*¹ was formed in March of 1992 by U.S. President George H. W. Bush and Russian President Boris Yeltsin. The Joint Commission cited three objectives, two of which are the focus of the adjacent article,² titled *The Gulag Study*: 1) To determine if any American POWs were being held against their will in the former Soviet Union and, if so, to secure their release; and 2) To determine the fate of unaccounted-for US servicemen who had been in the Soviet Union or about whom the Russian government might have information.

Though the actual *USRJC* commissioners are members of the executive and legislative branches of U.S. government, it is the Commission's Support Directorate³ that tackles most of the work. The Directorate authored several editions of the Gulag Study, two of which (the 1st and 5th) I discuss in the related article mentioned above. The 1st Edition was published in 1993 and the 5th came out in 2005⁴. Together they contain 161 pages of information, reports, and analysis.

Inasmuch as the 5th Edition was published 16 years ago, it certainly cannot be considered the last word on the issue of POW transfers to the Soviet Union. Though it sets out a definitive analysis of considerable information, the question of whether men were taken and, if so, which ones remains officially unanswered. To those of us whose loved ones just disappeared without explanation in the Korean War, and who have studied the Transfer Issue, there is no doubt. The only questions are which men were taken and what happened to them.

The Commission Support Directorate studied the question of POW transfers through oral history programs and by conducting research in myriad archives and libraries, both in the US and in former Soviet countries. A more detailed discussion is set forth in the adjacent article.

¹ Alternatively, the "Joint Commission," the "Commission," or the "JC").

² Titled *The Gulag Study: Addressing the Question of Whether American POWs Were Taken to the USSR and Not Returned*.

³ The Support Directorate was formerly referred to as the Commission's Support Branch.

⁴ The full content of both Gulag studies can be found on the *Coalition's* website.

The Unremitting Question About American P.O.W.s:
Were some taken from North Korea to the former Soviet Union?

By Donna D. Knox
 (June 2021)

Early last year, the Coalition announced an upcoming review of evidence relating to the issue of whether Americans were taken from the theater of combat in North Korea and transferred to the Soviet Union. We expected to publish those articles throughout 2020. But then the COVID struck, life went haywire, and here we are in June of 2021. We are, however, ready now to do what we wanted to do a year ago.

When I thought about writing this series of articles, I intended to lay out the questions and then the answers, or lack thereof, in a neat, orderly fashion. But, when I sat down to write this first piece, I was overwhelmed by the boxes and folders and notebooks—all of which contain reports, transcripts of hearings, media coverage, archival research, and a great deal more. Suffice it to say that the so-called Live Prisoner Transfer issue is complex and uncertain.

I decided that setting out some history would be the best way to begin. In future articles, I will delve more deeply into details of certain sightings and reports.

The question of whether P.O.W.s were being held back was raised before the Korean War even ended. Officials noted discrepancies between enemy reports of how many men had been captured versus U.S. reports of how many men were missing. For example, a December 21, 1951, message from General Headquarters Far East Command references the 'incompleteness' of the P.O.W. list furnished by the Communists and goes on to 'assume' the inaccuracy was being challenged. It further states that Intelligence indicated there were live prisoners who were not named on the list.. (*Editor's Note: Complete documents are found on the Coalition's website: www.coalitionoffamilies.org*)

A September 2, 1952, CIA Information Report cites a 'source' that reported it was known that transit camps for P.O.W.s captured in Korea had been established in Komso-molsk-on-Amur, in the Russian Far East, and that American P.O.W.s were passing through those transit camps.

In December of 1953, the Assistant Secretary of the Army, Hugh Milton, issued a memo to the Army Chief of Staff requesting detailed information about 610 Army personnel who were listed by the U.S. as P.O.W.s but were

still unaccounted for. Interestingly, the information Milton sought pertained to education and technical skills, among other things, suggesting a concern that men with certain knowledge and expertise were being selected out and not acknowledged.

These are just three of numerous reports, memos, and other interactions within the U.S. government from early on that showed a growing concern that all was not as it should be in terms of the Communists' accounting for Americans who had been captured. Some six months after the Armistice was signed in July of 1953, the Department of State issued a report titled *Efforts to Secure the Return of American Personnel Who Might Still Be In Communist Custody*. The report stated that the United Nations Command had collected information from 'every known source' to make sure all prisoners were accounted for, and that careful screening of the information had produced evidence that there might be some personnel in Communist custody who were not returned during the prisoner exchange nor otherwise accounted for.

By this time, so many reports and resulting questions had leaked through the media that the American public and Congress began pressing for more to be done. Finally, then-Secretary of the Army, Robert Stevens, wrote a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense in which he recommended that the military, in concert with the State Department, form detailed plans to initiate diplomatic negotiations. Whatever plans they came up with yielded no results.

All of this is to say that the unexplained disappearance of some American servicemen who fought in Korea has been known for some 70 years. Were some of them taken to the Soviet Union? We still have no answers and the most oft-repeated explanation from our government is simply that there is 'no credible evidence' that men were taken and not returned.

I am an attorney. In a court of law, when evidence is put forth, it stands unless and until it is shown to lack credibility. The issue presented does not just go away because someone says they cannot prove the evidence to be right or wrong.

The matter asserted and supported by evidence is
(Continue to the Next Page)



deemed credible unless additional evidence shows affirmatively that it is not.

In light of the numerous reports that Americans were taken to the Soviet Union and not returned, an aggressive and thorough investigation should have been ongoing. But from what we have been able to ascertain, this is not the case.

At a hearing in September of 1996, then-Congressman Bob Dornan, who chaired the House Subcommittee on Military Personnel, referenced his 31 years of direct involvement with the issue of missing servicemen, as well as the past twenty months in which he had conducted a series of hearings in order to provide effective oversight of the fullest possible accounting of Americans still missing in action. In his comments Dornan referenced the 'lack of competence by an entrenched bureaucracy.' He further stated that "this shameful institutional performance is best described as an unrelenting predisposition to discredit and dismiss all information and reports that have merit and might lead to resolving cases of Americans known to have been alive in communist captivity."

At that same hearing, Colonel Phillip Corso (Retired) testified that he had been Head of the Special Projects Branch/Intelligence Division/Far East Command under General MacArthur. Upon his return to the U.S., Corso was assigned to the White House National Security Council, a position from which he handled 'virtually all' projects related to U.S. P.O.W.s. Corso testified as to several reports that Americans had been sent to the Soviet Union for intelligence exploitation.

I also testified at that hearing. As Colonel Corso and I sat together in a room waiting to be called, he confided in me that, when he shared this information with then-President Eisenhower, the President asked him what he would do if he were President: tell the American People the truth and risk war with the Soviet Union or hide the truth to protect peace and prevent additional losses. Corso told me his answer was to hide the truth. And that's what they did.

Congressman Dornan made an insightful remark at that hearing. He stated that, in the nuclear shadow of the Cold War, Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy were faced with a classic dilemma: risk millions of innocent citizens or leave American P.O.W.s in gulags behind the iron curtain. Dornan went on to say that, after the fall of the Soviet Union, there was no credible explanation for not utilizing this country's vast resources to finally keep the faith and de-

mand the fullest possible accounting. That was twenty-five years ago and we still have no answers.

At that time, the U.S. Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs (USRJC) was four years in existence. Part of the USRJC's mission was (and remains) to determine whether American servicemen were being held against their will on the territory of the former Soviet Union, and, if so, to secure their immediate release and repatriation. The Department of Defense's POW/Missing Personnel Office (called DPMO at the time) was tasked with providing analytical and investigative support to the Joint Commission. All of this was a positive step forward in terms of the government taking on the live prisoner transfer issue. That being said, the tenacles of bureaucratic delay and avoidance had not been fully rooted out.



Perm 36 Gulag

In 1999, the U.S. side of the USRJC raised 'the Memoirs' with its Russian counterparts. The Memoirs is a diary, of sorts, compiled decades earlier by a Russian named Veniamin Dodin who lived in internal exile within the former Soviet Union most of his life. Dodin claimed to have, on multiple occasions, heard about, been told about, and seen evidence of Americans in the USSR against their will during the 1940s and 50s.

Nothing concrete came about in terms of an investigation by the USRJC until 2005. At its plenary session in Moscow that year, the two sides of the Commission agreed to fully investigate information contained in Dodin's Memoirs. They agreed to hold a second archival conference to advance relevant issues. The Russian side responded favorably to the proposal and various Russian archivists proposed discussion topics.

Unfortunately, DPMO's leadership disapproved of the initiative. A member of the USRJC at the time informed me that DPMO asserted that it's budget allocations would remain focused on more 'immediate' requirements, such as expanding its data base. The Commission member also told me that the Memoirs included, among other things, a diagram that purportedly showed where some twenty U.S. POWs from the Korean War were led from a Soviet mining camp, and that at least one of the names listed on the diagram matched that of a missing American serviceman. I am not privy to the details behind DPMO's decision. But, on the surface, it would appear that the agency declined to support a cooperative effort with the Russians that could well have shed informative light on the transfer issue.

Access to relevant Soviet files is a *sina qua non* on the Transfer Issue. Hopefully, the era of missed opportunities has gone by.

Membership

The *Coalition* relies on memberships and broader donations to pursue the issues that need to be resolved in order to learn what happened to the missing men.

Much of this work is done in Washington, DC. Multiple visits each year incur expenses beyond the *Coalition's* regular operation. Please add to your \$25 membership donation and help support these expenses. The more we are able to travel to the nation's capital, the better we can advocate on the men's behalf.



The *Coalition of Families of Korean & Cold War POW/MIAs* is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, dedicated to accounting for the thousands of American servicemen who are still missing from the Korean and Cold Wars. Their stories should be told and closure found for their families.

Thank you.

Coalition of Families of Korean and Cold War POW/MIAs
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PO Box 4194

Portsmouth, NH 03802

818.259.9950

coalitionoffamilies@gmail.com

www.coalitionoffamilies.org