MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: President Ford
House Select Committee on MIA's
Cong. G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery (D.-Miss.), Chairman
Cong. Paul N. McCloskey, Jr. (R.-Calif.)
Cong. Richard L. Ottinger (D.-NY)
Cong. Benjamin Gilman (R.-NY)
Angus MacDonald, Staff Director
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Max Friedersdorf, Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs
Bob Wolthius, Deputy Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs

DATE AND TIME: Monday, January 26, 1976
4:43 - 5:30 p.m.

PLACE: The Oval Office

[Small talk]

The President: Tell me about your trip.

Montgomery: It was a very good trip. The attitude of the leadership was very different from the early days when Kissinger used to deal with them. We were told we couldn't have US military and flags for recognizing the remains, but we did it our way. We had a fine ceremony at the airport with North Vietnamese looking on. We didn't see any bomb damage -- we didn't want to. Only the bridge. It's an old town. The only new building is the Cuban hotel. We saw the Hanoi Hilton. They stressed there were no Americans alive.

They discussed Article 21 of the Agreement. We met with Pham Van Dong. He was cordial and he raised Article 21. We told him of your letter and...
of your Asian speech [Honolulu speech, December 7] about mutual
gestures of good will. And we got a shopping list of wants from him.
It is really the JEC list.

The Committee still hasn't taken any policy steps but we feel the ball
is back in our court. They have lived up to everything they have told us.
They let the nine go; they gave us the three bodies; we could have the two
marines if Kennedy would get on the ball.

The gestures should best come from you. We told them there was no
way to get economic or reconstruction aid. [Mentioned things which
could be done.]

Dong said he wanted to come to the United States and wanted more
Americans to come to Vietnam.

The President: Do they let Americans come freely?

Montgomery: No, not now.

Gilman: I seriously think they want better relations with us. I mentioned
the oil drilling.

The President: How many MIA's do you think are left in Vietnam?

Montgomery: Probably about a total of 2500-odd MIA's but I think not
more than 250 bodies could be recovered. There are many problems
involved -- the impact, animals, vegetation, etc.

The President: Have you had any contact with the League of Families?

McCloskey: Here is a resolution of the League. We meet with them
Saturday.

Two other things: You would get along well with Pham Van Dong. He is
a gracious man. We thought your Hawaii speech was an affirmative speech,
but they said you came over and doubled the aid to Indonesia and the
Philippines.

I don't know when you would invite Dong here but you would get along with
him as well as you did with Teng Hsiao-ping.
We want to wrap up by September. State has a two-to-four year time frame so we are in conflict with them. I urge you to hasten on the reciprocal gestures. State thinks lifting the trade ban is too big a gesture, but . . .

The President: Would they let us look for MIA's?

Ottinger: They said if we would drop our hostility, they could cooperate on MIA's. There are two alternatives: deal on a step-by-step basis or sit down with State and negotiate the whole thing out. I think that is the way to go to give them some independence.

The President: Do they acknowledge they have closer ties with the Soviet Union?

Montgomery: They never mentioned the situation and we never saw a Soviet or a Chinese.

The President: How about Laos?

Montgomery: There was a mixup there. They thought at first we were coming in there to spy. They told us there were no Americans alive. They had no information on where they crashed. The government is pretty loosely managed.

McCloskey: They badly need medicine, etc.

Ottinger: They admitted they were desperate.

McCloskey: The Lao and the Thai are right across the river from each other. The question is whether they will stimulate insurgency in Thailand.

The President: Is the Lao Government independent or pro-North Vietnam, or pro-Chinese, or pro-Soviet?

Montgomery: I think the North Vietnamese call the shots. There are some Soviets there also. We did see some.

McCloskey: They are not as sure of their control as in North Vietnam.
The President: Are there MIA's in Cambodia?

Montgomery: Yes, 30. We couldn't even make contact with them.

The President: We couldn't either, during Mayaguez.

Gilman: The JCRC have 23 North Vietnamese MIA's which we could use for exchange.

The President: I appreciate this information. Let us take a good look at the situation and what can be done. I will talk to Kissinger.

Ottinger: He has bitter memories. What we have to remember is it isn't the same.

The President: The first thing is to get the remains back. The second is to see if we can breach the relationship with the Soviet Union. The Chinese are worried about that. We will look into it. In the meantime there are more and more families changing status.

Montgomery: We have an agreement with DOD that there will be no status changes unless requested until after our report in September. The parents are the biggest problem. Some of them don't ever want a change. There is a tremendous financial difference.

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Montgomery: Maybe the UNHCR could work with the new MIA agency in Hanoi on this MIA data.

McCloskey: We are getting some plastic surgeons to go over to help some children. They give time each year to do things like this. They have done this work on a doctor-to-doctor basis, not only in the US but in Latin America and other areas.

Gilman: They went out of their way to make a clear gesture of these three bodies. I think through some gesture on your part we can keep the ball rolling.

The President: What would you suggest?
Gilman: I think the aid is best.

McCloskey: I, of course, tend toward trade, but they really lack hotel facilities. There are people here who would like to go in there.

Ottenger: I would like to resolve it all at once rather than at a snail's pace. Give recognition, get a neutral agency to go in to look for sites -- let the American people know these are tied together.
P. Tell me about your trip.

M. Very good trip. All right. I understand you think you flew in a couple days within K Word & did all right.

P. We understand you couldn't show US military flags on your plane. We did it anyway. We decided this was a gift. It is still green, and we didn't want to fly a bridge. It looked green.

M. Okay. They didn't like the green, but we were. They forced this. We have no arms abroad.

P. We explained that. We went with them.

M. We left after two days. We asked them for more food. We got a couple of cases of beer from them. It is really cool.

P. The plane was not taken any further. They paid a bill to take in our cargo. We don't know why. They took in all kinds. They left the green.

M. They gave us 10,000 yen. We could have copper wires.

P. Sure, we could have copper cables.

M. We don't want.

P. I promised the ships would be taken. We will hand them over. I guaranteed the aid.
From my MRTs, if you smoke one bag in CM
W, just about a total of 2500 odd MRTs but
stick with more than 250 boxes each is
preferred. Many parts involved - engine, animal, vegetable, etc.

P: Have you tried any Krays contact

M: Here is a suggestion of a language. We met of

Saturday.

Two main things: you would get along well with

Vaswani. He is a generous man.

Cos that your chemistry with chemist offensive

which that many years can demand & do.

Early with me when you could invite David

how hard, you would get along well with

as friends.

We won't carry on by strict. Start has

2-4 pp and leave to one in unhappy

of them. I urge you to discuss once un-

expectedly. Start thinking lately

hard here is the big question, that

be added. If you, let us hold for MRTs

My friend to very well. They are healthy

that they worked in MRT.

And then we all are @ hospital. My

hall was to get down of starts & subject

critical thing and I. Not slight, every go

Do be nice. Have the by of SO

P: They under universal set & accuse

for a Goa at a Ehrmann

P: How about LDL?

M: There was a tipping thing. They that will find

an ride early on things this way.
They all in three rooms up across.

My wife on which they crashed. Great was pretty.

They really went without me.

They submitted. They were always happy at 3 in the

They are right across. Very. Question to whether

They will still submit for any reason in that.

I do have just a small pre-NNH, PCC, SC.

Strange. We were talking. There are some

Some of those also. We did not some.

They not as some of theirs control as in NZ.

One thing or A in Newfoundland

Yes, yes. We could not make anything.

We could not either. Having managing,

The JRC have 23 NZ NH, which in small

we had no exchange.

I suppose this would be just take a good look at it

what can be done. Should talk to.

She has better memories. That we had a remember

it went wrong.

First thing is to get someone back. I felt to use

if we can break a relation of S/C. JRC.

I worried about that. We could talk into it.

Unbelievable. Other are more. More familiar

Changer state.

We have agreement of DOD that is neither change.

Unbelievable required it at some request in Sept.

That presented as a major point. Some of them

denied exists a change. There is a tremendous

financial shift.

We thought UNHCR could make a new major change in

Holding on about the new RH state.
We are all getting some plastic film and paper to help your destination. I think you think more of those things like this. They have, right, their waste and limits. I think mine, actually

6. The important of then any to get the clean spirit of this is because. I think them yours
great deal of your part, we can help sell

P. About what you suggest

C. With the oil in last,

W. Of course, and second it, but they really lack for them. There are people there, and is like to genuine ones.

O. I would like to replace it all at once rather than at separate pace. Can some way, yet

W. I would suggest you go in to look for what. At

O. Some people--these are tied together.

P. A little long.