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U.S. Commandos At the Ready To Save POWs

Commandos are waiting to rescue their long-lost American comrades being held prisoner in Southeast Asia. All they need is solid evidence of the missing men's whereabouts, and a go-ahead from the government.

President Reagan has promised to take whatever action is necessary to recover soldiers and airmen who are known to have survived years of captivity in Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia. CIA-trained commandos have carried out one raid into Laos in search of American prisoners of war.

The CIA raiders made the foray after the Pentagon studied refugee reports and aerial photographs showing human shadows that looked too large to be cast by Asians, and an arrangement of logs that appeared to spell the number 52 on the ground.

At first the commandos were driven back by gunfire. But, a month later, two of them managed to reach the camp and take pictures of the occupants. Unfortunately, not one was American, and there was no evidence to show that Americans had ever been held there.

Though that daring raid didn't pan out, the administration is pre-

pared to follow up future leads. One source close to the situation told my associate Donald Goldberg: "It is a current capability. There are people capable of performing that function."

By presidential proclamation, tomorrow is National POW-MIA Recognition Day. The purpose is to remind the nation that there are still more than 2,000 American servicemen who have not been accounted for, more than seven years after the end of the Vietnam war.

There are some Americans who need no such reminder. They are the families of the missing men, holding their annual meeting in Washington this week. It is the 13th annual meeting the POW-MIA families have held.

What nourishes their hope after all these years is the spate of eyewitness accounts of POW sightings in recent years, mostly from refugees who fled Southeast Asia. Just since 1979, the Pentagon has received 372 such accounts. Already this year 31 witnesses have been interviewed, three of them claiming to have seen American prisoners alive within the last several months.

The State Department takes a skeptical view of these reports, on grounds that desperate refugees will say anything they think will get them into the United States. Yet most of the refugees who provided information were already living here, and had nothing to gain by concocting a story.

The Defense Intelligence Agency is convinced that Americans are still being held prisoner in Southeast Asia. French prisoners were held in Indochina for as long as 25 years before being released.

The Pentagon is reluctant to make public the information it has on the missing Americans. Adm. E. A. Burkhalter, acting DIA director, said that if the Vietnamese discovered that we knew of an American's whereabouts they might take steps to get rid of the evidence.

Above the Law: Many Americans who have had their disability cut off by the Social Security Administration's review program are appealing their cases to SSA administrative law judges. But they're up against a stacked deck.

Simply put, the agency considers itself above the law. An internal agency document puts it baldly: "Federal courts do not run SSA programs. . . . Administrative law judges are responsible for applying the [Health and Human Services] secretary's policies and guidelines, regardless of court decisions below the level of the Supreme Court."

Executive Memo: Labor Secretary Raymond J. Donovan has put his suburban Washington town house up for sale for \$235,000. He paid \$215,000 cash for the house last year, and has never lived in it. His real estate agent is Antoinette Hatfield, wife of Sen. Mark O. Hatfield (R-Ore.).