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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

American Children

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: COLIN L. POWELL  
SUBJECT: Amerasian Children

In response to your inquiry on the Amerasian story on ABC World News Tonight, the attached paper will update you on the current status of the program and the facts concerning the ABC story.

Attachment

Tab A Information Sheet

Prepared by:  
Richard Childress

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AMERASIAN CHILDREN

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ABC's World News Tonight  
Monday Evening, March 28

ABC's Sam Donaldson: Finally tonight, the story of a family search across time and history. When the United States left Vietnam, some 8-10,000 children fathered by American GIs were left behind -- many of them abandoned, to be blunt about it, because their fathers wanted nothing to do with them. But that was not the case in every instance. So when the government of Vietnam recently agreed to allow Amerasian children to leave for the United States, if their fathers wanted them, some ex-GIs set out to claim their own. Ken Kashiwahara followed the quest of three such men who went to Vietnam in search of the children they had left behind.

ABC's Ken Kashiwahara: It was a journey born of frustration, three Americans flying back to Vietnam to a past they left behind 15 years ago, to do what their government and the Vietnamese had failed to do: get their children to America. They carried evidence of years of unbending bureaucracies -- letters and telegrams to Washington and Hanoi, and photographs.

(Don Berges, father: "Our government has abandoned these kids just the way helicopters and jeeps were left behind in '75. There's someone very high up who has just decided, well, let's write these kids off.")

(Don Benson, father: "You look at all the paperwork and you say, by God, here it is, finally. And then the bottom falls out. Yeh, there's anger. A lot of it.")

Arriving in Vietnam in a city named after Ho Chi Minh, the fathers found the red symbols of the new communist order turned into a red carpet. One by one, the images in the photographs came alive in a rush of emotion.

(TV Coverage of father being united with daughter.)

Don Berges meeting his 16-year-old daughter Tao (phonetic) and her mother, who was pregnant when Berges left Vietnam. It was the first-ever meeting between father and daughter.

(Berges: "It's been a long time. I've been waiting for this for a long time. Makes things complete.")

And Don Benson, seeing his daughter Han Dung (phonetic) for the first time since she was four.

(TV Coverage of father being reunited with daughter.)

Benson married Han Dung's Vietnamese mother but when they moved to the United States, Han Dung was left behind with her grandparents for what was supposed to be a year or two. They didn't count on the communist takeover.

(Benson: "We're both talking at the same time. There's no problem in recognition.")

And at another location, Carl Barefield being united with his 15-year-old son Tan Hoon (phonetic), abandoned by his Vietnamese mother after he was born.

(Barefield: "I can't speak Vietnamese and he can't speak English. But he knew me; I knew him.")

Two of the fathers were allowed to visit their daughters' homes, traveling for two days in the now-peaceful Mekong Delta, a countryside they had only known in the violence of war.

## AMERASIAN CHILDREN (continued)

Kashiwahara continues: For Don Benson, visiting his daughter's home was a chance to see friends and his in-laws again. For the townspeople, it was a chance to see an American for the first time since the communist takeover. For Benson's daughter, it meant saying goodbye to those she grew up with.

In another town, 16-year-old Tao was proud that her American father was coming, she said, even though she has suffered discrimination as an Amerasian. But Berges's visit ended in disappointment. Tao's grandfather decided she should Vietnam only with her mother and Vietnamese family, a complication which would mean more time-consuming bureaucratic procedures.

(Berges: "I'm worried that if I don't get her out in the next day or two, that somehow this little window that we see opening will be closed.")

It is unclear why the Vietnamese government agreed to cut through all the red tape to help the American fathers, but as one Vietnamese official put it: We did our part; now it is up to the American government.

The children still had to be interviewed and approved by U.S. State Department officials, still had to go through medical exams and be cleared by the government of Thailand, the first stop on their journey to America. (John Jones, U.S. consular official: "You have three governments involved here. You have the Vietnamese government, you have the Royal Thai government, and you have our government. And they've all got to come together.")

But the dreams turn to despair. To American officials, Carl Barefield's son didn't look Amerasian, didn't look white enough. His father, they said, would have to come up with more proof that Tan Hoon was his son. Barefield's reaction:

(Barefield: "Disappointment. Disappointment. I had pretty high hopes here in the last couple days, especially after the Vietnamese government themselves more or less cleared everything.")

For the others, the bureaucratic machinery simply would not move fast enough. The three fathers would have to leave their children behind. Don Benson was too distraught to talk about it. Carl Barefield sat alone with his own thoughts. Don Berges perhaps summed up the concerns of all.

(Berges: "What are they going to do after I leave Vietnam and after I leave Thailand? Will everybody forget about this on both sides?")

The questions increase the pain of parting again. The fathers could only take with them the hope that their presence here will now speed up their children's departure. And the children? They can only go back to their dreams of following their fathers to a brighter future, to a new home in America.

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AMERASIANS: ABC World News Tonight March 28, 1988

Background:

The Department of State is working to bring to the United States all Amerasians and their family members who wish to come. We give lists to the Vietnamese authorities requesting interviews for all cases we know about, then the Vietnamese bring the Amerasians to interviews with INS and Consular officers in Ho Chi Minh City. The current processing rate is approximately 450 persons per month.

Through FY 87 we brought in 9,500 people (3,900 Amerasians and 6,600 accompanying relatives). The program expanded in numbers and public interest in FY 88 following the U.S.-SRV bilateral agreement last September and new legislation in December. The law now permits the admission of Amerasians as a separate category of immigrant without numerical limitation for a two-year period. As a further benefit, Amerasians can qualify on the basis of physical appearance alone. Accompanying relatives must present documentary evidence.

Our objective is to bring out the greatest number of Amerasians and their relatives in the shortest period of time. This necessitates reliable procedures. The requirements include: (1) interview by a U.S. official, (2) medical exam and clearance, and (3) documentation for the relatives. Departure also involves the Vietnamese granting an exit permit and the Royal Thai Government authorizing entry.

In less than 10 percent of the cases, an American father has come forward to be reunited with his child. On several occasions, fathers have gone into Vietnam looking for their children, and we have not discouraged this. The result is often mixed: the happiness of reunification but frustration with the legal requirements and procedures. In most cases, fathers work with and through special U.S. offices in Washington and Bangkok, and no such misunderstanding occurs.

The ABC Story:

The Amerasian stories make for compelling television. Regrettably, ABC World News Tonight took a negative slant on three specific cases without reporting the success of a government program which benefits thousands. In two of the cases, ABC failed to report that the USG has given all necessary approvals, and we are waiting for the Vietnamese side to put them on a flight. One case was accurately reported as not having been approved because the child could not establish eligibility through documentation or physical appearance. (This has happened in only a handful of Amerasian cases.) This child may still qualify for entry to the United States if the father can produce further evidence. There has been a prior exchange between State and ABC on an irresponsible Amerasian story which was aired on ABC's 20/20 last November.

DEAN M'GRATH  
115 (ROOM)

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(Don Berges, father: "Our government has abandoned these kids just the way helicopters and jeeps were left behind in '75. There's someone very high up who has just decided, well, let's write these kids off.")

(Don Benson, father: "You look at all the paperwork and you say, by God, here it is, finally. And then the bottom falls out. Yeh, there's anger. A lot of it.")

Arriving in Vietnam in a city named after Ho Chi Minh, the fathers found the red symbols of the new communist order turned into a red carpet. One by one, the images in the photographs came alive in a rush of emotion.

(TV Coverage of father being united with daughter.)

Don Berges meeting his 16-year-old daughter Tao (phonetic) and her mother, who was pregnant when Berges left Vietnam. It was the first-ever meeting between father and daughter.

(Berges: "It's been a long time. I've been waiting for this for a long time. Makes things complete.")

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Benson married Han Dung's Vietnamese mother but when they moved to the United States, Han Dung was left behind with her grandparents for what was supposed to be a year or two. They didn't count on the communist takeover.

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And at another location, Carl Barefield being united with his 15-year-old son Tan Hoon (phonetic), abandoned by his Vietnamese mother after he was born.

(Barefield: "I can't speak Vietnamese and he can't speak English. But he knew me; I knew him.")

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## AMERASIAN CHILDREN (continued)

Kashiwahara continues: For Don Benson, visiting his daughter's home was a chance to see friends and his in-laws again. For the townspeople, it was a chance to see an American for the first time since the communist takeover. For Benson's daughter, it meant saying goodbye to those she grew up with.

In another town, 16-year-old Tao was proud that her American father was coming, she said, even though she has suffered discrimination as an Amerasian. But Berges's visit ended in disappointment. Tao's grandfather decided she should Vietnam only with her mother and Vietnamese family, a complication which would mean more time-consuming bureaucratic procedures.

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It is unclear why the Vietnamese government agreed to cut through all the red tape to help the American fathers, but as one Vietnamese official put it: We did our part; now it is up to the American government.

The children still had to be interviewed and approved by U.S. State Department officials, still had to go through medical exams and be cleared by the government of Thailand, the first stop on their journey to America. (John Jones, U.S. consular official: "You have three governments involved here. You have the Vietnamese government, you have the Royal Thai government, and you have our government. And they've all got to come together.")

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(Berges: "What are they going to do after I leave Vietnam and after I leave Thailand? Will everybody forget about this on both sides?")

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