

Record of conversation with
Col Bannon and Capt. George Fack
(Marinea) on Thursday evening Jan 21, 1944
(spelling?)
Lloyd, Chris & I present.

Col Bannon was Bernie's C.O. in Vietnam
at the time he was shot down, Capt. Fack
was flying the other A-4 that was
sent with Bernie that night.

After the usual greetings and a brief
general conversation, Col Bannon said "I
suppose you'd like to talk about Bernie".
His first remark was that there is no
doubt that Bernie is gone. He then told
about how they spent quite a bit of time
together participating in athletics and
they went to mass and Communion together
every Sunday and there was no doubt
in his mind that Bernie was in the
state of grace when he died. This
was obviously a very important point to
Col Bannon. He stated his views on the

value of our presence in Vietnam, the point being that this was not a waste, although it is a tragedy. He talked about his high regard for Berme, and it was obvious that he was sincere, and not just being nice. He said ~~that~~ he talked to Berme about staying in the Marines, because they wanted people like him, but Berme said he was coming back to the farm. Col Cannon feels strongly that holding out a thread of hope that Berme is alive is wrong, and that he has a moral obligation to do what he can about getting the chap changed.

Regarding the harness, he said a harness and some burnt shroud lines were seen by a helicopter pilot the next day. He and George jointly explained that this harness is something very difficult to get out of - something like a coverall without legs that fits tight, and that a pilot would not immediately get out of the harness. He would want to take it

off until he had escaped immediate danger. A survival vest is worn over the harness and two survival radios are carried in the vest. Before he would have gotten to the harness, he would have been talking on the radio.

I asked how they would explain the presence of the harness. George said he doubted that the helicopter pilot was sure that it was a harness. They then explained that there was no crater or large area where the aircraft impacted and that therefore the aircraft came apart before it hit the ground, and that pieces, including possibly the harness went in every direction when the aircraft exploded.

George then explained that ~~his~~ his ordnance would not release that night, so when Bernie went in he made it his business to be in a position to do nothing but observe Bernie as he was making his run. He said he saw sparks

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that looked like a 4th of July sparkle, then a sheet of flame that went into the target area. He said he has had two tours in Vietnam, has flown over 500 hops over there, and has seen about 5 other airplanes go down in more or less similar circumstances. He said he knows what an ejection seat rocket blast looks like and he did not see one. He was surprised that a possible rocket flash was mentioned in the letter.

The result of the conversation is that I know that these two men are convinced that there is no possibility of Cornin having survived. They are both very warm and down to earth people - especially Al Banner - and they feel that it is wrong for the marines to hold out the thread of hope based on the harness and the rocket flash.

Al Banner said ~~at~~ the situation

is being re-evaluated, because he is pushing it. Whether the official funding will be changed, he doesn't know. He ~~had~~ hadn't seen the letter that was sent out, and took Lloyd's copy with him.

He said he is very willing to talk to Carol and Mom + Dad. There is no problem with him doing this informally. His formal position is on record.

North

Col Bannon mentioned several times how he thought that keeping people listed as MIA for as long as possible was based on monetary considerations - the fact that his pay continues, etc. However, he clearly recognizes and understands Carol's situation and what seven to ten years
over

of just waiting around would mean
to her.

Col Bannan as well as George had
flown with Berne many times. They
said his nickname was Orville because
he had won the Wright award. They
had a very high regard for Berne in every way.

They thought the request for pictures
was ridiculous because they had pictures
of Berne in his flight gear - it was a
requirement before they could fly in Vietnam.

They said the helicopter that reported
seeing the harness was hit 3 times that
day. Col Bannan had A-1 going in to
the same area next day and they were
receiving heavy fire. He said he had
some pictures taken but they didn't
really show anything. He said if
he thought there was the slightest chance of
Berne's survival, he would have done everything
he could to rescue him.