

Controversy continues to swirl around Edmonton filmmaker Michael Jorgensen's documentary, Unclaimed

Man who claims to be long-lost American prisoner of war a fraud, U.S. government claims; Hot Docs won't drop film from lineup

BY JON SWAINE, LDT MAY 2, 2013

Presented By:



Filmmaker Michael Jorgensen

A man living in the Vietnamese jungle, whose claims to be a long-lost American prisoner of war are at the centre of a new documentary by Edmonton filmmaker Michael Jorgensen, has been accused of fabricating his claims.

Dang Tan Ngoc convinced relatives and comrades of Sgt. John Hartley Robertson that he was the missing Green Beret, who was presumed dead after his helicopter was shot down over Laos in 1968.

The remarkable story of the frail 76-year-old is told in Unclaimed, the new film by the Emmy-winning

Jorgensen that generated excitement after its premiere in Toronto this week.

Yet a declassified U.S. military document has suggested that Mr. Ngoc is a Vietnamese citizen of French origin whose claims to be Sgt. Robertson have been debunked by diplomats.

"Most recently, in late 2008 Mr Ngoc again posed as Mr. Robertson and was taken to the US embassy in Phnom Penh where he was fingerprinted," according to the 2009 defence department memo.

"The fingerprints were subsequently evaluated by the FBI, which concluded Mr Ngoc's fingerprints did not match those in SFC Robertson's records."

Mr Ngoc, who has a wife and children in Vietnam, would have been entitled to back pay and veterans' benefits from the American government if it had been established that he was Sgt. Robertson.

The finding is a setback to the filmmakers and relatives such as Jean Robertson Holly, the soldier's sister, who is seen embracing Mr. Ngoc and testifying to his "true" identity in the film.

"There's no question," she says in the film. "When I held his head in my hands and looked in his eyes, there was no question that was my brother."

The film's producers defended their work, saying that it "ended in a family reunited with the man they have identified to be their John H. Robertson, despite the U.S. government's claims to the contrary".

In an interview with the Globe and Mail on Thursday, Jorgensen said the U.S. government should release all the research it claims to have done on the soldier's identity in the past 22 years.

"If he's a fraud, I'm not sure how he convinced his family and a guy he served with that he's somebody he's not by his physical appearance and the information that he knows," said Jorgensen, whose investigative documentaries for television have included Battle of the X-Planes, Hunt for the Mad Trapper and Hitler's Stealth Fighter.

According to the Globe, representatives from Hot Docs said Wednesday they would not pull Unclaimed from the festival.

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