MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD:

SUBJECT: Review of Circumstances Surrounding the Disappearance of Personnel Presumed Dead

1. The following personnel were determined to be missing in action on 31 January 1945 when they failed to return to military control after the liberation of Stalag 30C, Altstadt, Poland, on 31 January 1945, by Russian troops:

   T Sgt Curren, Joseph J. 12009163
   S Sgt Sasnoka, Itsuji 20101594
   S Sgt Shipa, Cletis P. 6940175
   Sgt Aho, Edward W. 36931090
   Sgt Foreman, Harry W., Jr. 32552898
   Sgt Summey, Bennie 34013087
   Pfc Opfer, Carl G. 35550126
   Pvt McLean, Aloysious J. 36042935

Under the provisions of Section 5, Missing Persons Act, a Finding of Death was issued for each of these men, showing the presumed date of death as 1 March 1946 (SP&D No. 5506).

2. Inquiries were addressed to personnel known to have been at Stalag 30C in an effort to determine the status of these men. The pertinent portions of the replies received are quoted below:

   a. About T Sgt Joseph J. Curren former T Sgt Frank Hoedus, 12014540, Infantry, furnished the following statement in a letter dated 17 October 1945:

   "** ** When the Germans evacuated the Americans out of camp, they ran into a Russian patrol, the Russians opened fire, and few Americans were killed. T/Sgt. Curren was one of them. I didn't see T/Sgt. Curren body, but friends of mine say that they saw him dead."

   b. About S Sgt Itsuji Sasnoka S Sgt Michael M. Takanaga, 30101011, furnished the following information in a letter dated 12 December 1945:

   "** ** Sgt Sasnoka lived with me in the same barracks and on the morning of Jan. 31st, moved out together under German orders ** **. Approximately 2½ to 3 miles out of the camp, we were suddenly fired upon by Russians who had mistaken the identity of the marching column. ** ** Sgt. Sasnoka was alive at this moment. ** ** I crossed the road and lay down behind a tree. After that I did not see Sgt. Sasnoka ** **. I made my way back to the camp with the aid of two friends. I was separated from another Japanese-American boy, Sgt. Harry Kamiwada, the only one in this camp besides Sgt. Sasnoka and myself. This boy went with a group of approximately 300 to be immediately rescued by the Russians. We each thought that Sgt. Sasnoka was with the other. ** **
two weeks later, I met Sgt Kamikawa in a small Polish town near the German border and was surprised to find that Sgt. Saseoka was not with him. I did not personally see the wounded or dead, the result of Jan. 31st. I inquired but could not locate Sgt. Saseoka or learn of his fate. I do know that some bodies became unidentifiable due to the shell fire and the result of Russian tanks crushing bodies. 

"If Sgt. Saseoka was among those killed when fired upon by the Russians, there is every reason to believe that the Russians could have identified him by means if his dog tags other than a German prisoner identification tag, both of which I definitely know he had on his person."***

"I cannot say that I saw the body of Sgt. Saseoka or saw him wounded but *** I believe that he is now dead * * *"

In a letter dated 10 December 1945 Sgt Harry Kamikawa, 30104450, gave this version of the incident during which Sergeant Saseoka disappeared:

"* * *

"I last saw him on the morning of the 31st Jan 1945 about 10100, as we were being marched out of our P.W. camp, Stalag III C near Kurstin, Germany *** we were ambushed by the Russian Tanks, and fired upon, ***. The Russian Tanks kept on firing until a American soldier went up to them explaining that we were Americans, in that firing by the Russians a few of our boys got killed and a few wounded ***. The Russians called us toward them, and about three hundred of us ran toward them, by then the German guards gathered up the rest of the boys and marched them back to camp, taking them as hostages, in all that excitement I did not see where Sgt. Saseoka went to, but I know for sure he wasn't one of the three hundred that ran toward the Germans because I was in that group and I asked all the boys if they had seen him and the answer was no. The following day the rest of the boys that were marched back to camp were liberated, except about two hundred that were taken as hostages by the Germans and were marched in the direction of the town of Kurstin. I asked the boys that were liberated the following day if they had seen Sgt. Saseoka, and the answer was no again and no one could tell me if he was one of the two hundred that were taken as hostages to Kurstin ***."

c. Sgt Cletis F. Shipe was the subject of a special investigation as the result of his family's inquiries when he failed to return home at the end of hostilities. The European Theater informed this office that efforts to search for personnel in the area were hampered because it was in the Russian Zone. The only information on file concerning Sergeant Shipe is a casualty questionnaire filled in by Vernon Hugerditchian, 1601834, which states that he does not know for sure that Shipe was dead, but the Stalag was bombed and Sergeant Shipe was hit.

d. No definitive information was received to our inquiries about Sgt Edward W. Aho, Sgt Michael Bedia, 33171289, replied that he did not know Sergeant Aho, but furnished the information that two soldiers were killed in Odessa, Russia, when a wall collapsed on them and that they were buried there in Odessa.

e. No information concerning Sergeant Harry V. Foreman, Jr., 33562898, has been received other than that he was known to have been alive on 31 January 1945.
f. An inquiry to the field regarding Sgt Bennie Sumny, 34017087, produced a negative report. Sgt Leroy Coleman, 31091507, stated in a letter dated 27 November 1945 in reply to an inquiry from this office dated 21 November 1945 (file AG 704) that Sergeant Sumny was badly wounded by shrapnel in both legs on 31 January and was left behind in the care of Tec 5 Arthur R. Huord, 11038185, and Tec 5 Jesse W. Hoore, 38400057, who have returned since to the United States.

6. In the case of Pfc Cyril G. Opfer, 35550126, Sergeant Coleman stated in the same letter referred to in (f) that Private Opfer was wounded in the back at the same time and was left behind with Corporal LeVerne V. Johannesen, 37324473, and John A. Blakenan, 38002791, who have since returned to the United States. The mother of Private Opfer stated in a letter to this office that Clifford E. Dennis, 33817084, had informed her that her son was killed when the Russians fired on this column of prisoners.

h. The mother of Pvt Alloysius J. McLean, 36042935, sent several letters to the office which had been sent her by men who knew Private McLean in Stalag III C. One, signed "Vernon," and dated 6 December 1945, states that he had discussed efforts to escape with McLean and they had agreed to make the attempt if they had the opportunity. "Vernon" goes on to state that, when the Russians started to fire on the column, he and Private McLean threw themselves to the ground and he heard McLean say, "Now's our chance." After that he did not see Private McLean as they became separated in the confusion. Vernon joined the group that ran over to the Russian troops and he is certain that Private McLean was not in that group.

3. On 17 October 1945 Major George B. Wood, Chaplain of the 82d Airborne, wrote Mrs. Garnett Opfer the following information concerning the liberation of Stalag III C:

"After a month and a half of investigation I regret to inform you that the Division has been unable to find out anything further about your son. G-1 assigned an officer to the investigation, and after obtaining a permit that officer proceeded to Altdrewitz, Poland, where he contacted the Russian authorities. He found that Stalag III C had been burned to the ground at the time the Russian Army had liberated it. This had been done by the freed American and Russian prisoners and Polish civilians. The Russians have no records pertaining to the camp, and it is assumed they were lost in the fire. There are quite a number of dead buried there in a common grave, but there is no way to identify them and to distinguish the Americans from the Russians. I give you this summary in the words of the official report which was made to our chief of staff.

"A further contact was made with the Russian authorities in the hope that they might have records of American prisoners released by them, but they state there are no such records in Potsdam or Berlin."
4. Since the foregoing constitutes all the information available concerning these men, it is concluded that in no instance can a report of death under the provisions of Section 9, Missing Persons Act, be justified until further information, such as a report from The Quartermaster General that a burial report is on file, is received. Such facts as are at hand give no basis for stating where, when, and under what circumstances these men died.

Tuesday, May 11, 1943
Lulu May Lybrook
Investigator

CONCUR:

James A. Frix
Capt., AGD
Asst. CIC, Determination Unit
Casualty Section
Personnel Actions Branch, AGO

COPY FOR: Central Files
AG 201 and 293 file of each individual named in par. 1.

Source material obtained as a result of this investigation is filed in the AG 201 file of T/Sgt Joseph J. Curren, 12009163, unless otherwise indicated.