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PRESS ITEM FOR THE DCI

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Pows-Soviet 280

MOSCOW AP - U.S. and Soviet officials held talks today on complex diplomatic details surrounding the expected arrival here of three American pilots en route home from a North Vietnam prison camp.

An American Embassy spokesman said "an effort will be made to contact the prisoners" when they arrive from Peking. "We will try to be of help to them," the spokesman said.

The spokesman was asked about a statement from Pentagon official saying, "The first time they are offered the choice to turn themselves in to U.S. authorities, and they don't do it, they could be considered AWOL," adding this was not likely.

The embassy spokesman did not give a direct answer, but it was understood U.S. officials have no intention of putting pressure on the airmen to turn themselves in.

An American official said it was not clear what kind of visas the pilots hold. If they have only transit visas and are treated like other airline passengers with such visas they will probably be put up in a transient hotel until their departure Thursday.

This may exclude contact with American officials or newsmen. If the Soviets let American officials have free contact with the pilots they would risk angering the North Vietnamese, who support in the Vietnam war. On the other hand if the Soviets bar American officials it would run counter to the new era of warming relations between the two countries.

Top American officials in Moscow met at their request Foreign Ministry authorities. An American spokesman said it was unlikely any details of the arrangements worked out with the Soviets would be disclosed until the Americans had to confer with Washington.

1256PED 09-26

Comment: [redacted] the matter of meeting the prisoners there is still up in the air.

These comments represent the initial and tentative reaction of the Office of Current Intelligence to the attached item from the news services.

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DATE: 26 Sep
ITEM NO. 18
REF: NO.

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Attached is an AP dispatch, filed from Peking, reporting North Vietnamese charges that the US has been sending sophisticated espionage equipment through the mails to the POWs. Conduit of the charges are the antiwar activists escorting the three flyers home from Hanoi.

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Prisoner Spying

By PETER ARNETT

AP Special Correspondent

PEKING AP - The North Vietnamese have accused the United States of sending espionage equipment in packages mailed to prisoners of war, American antiwar activists reported here on Tuesday.

The charges were made by the Americans accompanying three American pilots on their way home after being released in Hanoi. In Washington, the Department of Defense issued a denial of the accusations.

Maj. Gen. Daniel James, a Pentagon spokesman, said:

"The charges are too ridiculous to dignify by trying to address them in detail. I know of no instance of such actions taking place and I think it is just another of the propaganda web that Hanoi is spinning to obscure the real facts concerning her intransigent position in refusing to negotiate meaningfully for all our prisoners of war."

MORE MORE
1323PED 09-26

Comment:

These comments represent the initial and tentative reaction of the Office of Current Intelligence to the attached item from the news services.

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PEKING Prisoner Spying A206 add: war."

This correspondent, who had accompanied the delegation and the freed pilots throughout the week, was not shown any of the materials. I was not told in advance about the display and was elsewhere in Hanoi when it took place.

The antiwar delegation said that representatives of the North Vietnamese government, in meetings during the past week in Hanoi, charged that sophisticated equipment capable of revealing camp locations and other information was sent to the prisoners from the United States.

They claimed that materials for receiving messages were sent in hollowed-out peanuts, bars of toilet soap, toothpaste tubes, pieces of candy, packages of chewing gum and instant coffee. They also said special paper for sending undetectable messages in letters to families was included.

The Americans said that items the North Vietnamese alleged were in the packages were displayed for them on a table at the Hoa Binh Hotel on Monday afternoon.

I was given photographs which the North Vietnamese told the Americans showed packages and contents sent to prisoners.

From the pictures it was possible to read the names of three alleged intended recipients; Charles Robert Tyler of Mesa, Arizona; William Robinson of North Carolina; and Edward Alan Brudino of Harrison, N.J.

MORE MORE
1329PED 09-26

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Prisoner Spying ADD

PEKING Prisoner Spying A207 3rd Add: Harrison, N.J.

Cora Weiss, leader of the four-member American delegation which went to Hanoi for the release of the pilots, said, "I cannot believe that the families would knowingly endanger the welfare of their men and keep them from getting the longed-for stuff from home. It looks to us an unmistakably professional job."

The new charges represented the latest turn of the POW issue, already the focus of international and domestic political debate.

The North Vietnamese accompanied their charges with demands that the United States put "an end to this practice," which they said had encroached on North Vietnam's Security. "The responsible authorities of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam have of course to take necessary steps to check that action."

The devices put forward by the North Vietnamese ranged from what they said was a radio receiver to paper that they said was capable of writing invisible messages.

Mrs. Weiss' group described the following:

-An extra-large tube of Colgate toothpaste which when squeezed out revealed what Hanoi said was a receiving apparatus with a battery compartment and an ear piece.

MORE

1336PED 09-26

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PEKING Prisoner Spying a206-7-9 4th Add: ear piece.

-Inside a candy bar were two pieces of 2-inch by 3-inch calligraphic paper with instructions for writing messages that would not be detectable. The special paper was to be folded so that it made a sharp edge and the secret message was to be written with this edge, the North Vietnamese said. Then, by using a code word in a normal letter, the prisoner would tell the receiver of his letter that there was a special message which would be found by special processing of the paper.

-Written requests in the various items asking for verification of the deaths of certain prisoners, for details about prison routine and security and prisoners' access to communications equipment.

-A peanut shell that had been hollowed out and contained a message and cans of Carnation milk and Maxwell House coffee which Hanoi said also had contained messages.

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