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U.S. FEARS HANOI IS BRAINWASHING AMERICAN P.O.W.'S

Pilot Exhibited to Newsmen
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Seems Like a Robot

PROPAGANDA AIM IS SEEN

Officials Emphasize North's
Refusal to Allow Check on
Claim of Humane Care

By NEIL SHEEHAN
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 3—The State Department expressed concern today that North Vietnam might be brainwashing American prisoners to obtain propaganda statements attacking United States policy.

Robert J. McCloskey, the State Department spokesman, cited an account in the current issue of Life magazine of a captured American pilot's appearance before foreign newsmen in Hanoi.

The department, Mr. McCloskey said, is "concerned at recent indications that North Vietnam may be using mental or physical pressure on American prisoners, American prisoners of war, to obtain confessions or statements critical of United States policy in Vietnam."

The article in Life, by Lee Lockwood, a free-lance American photographer who visited North Vietnam for four weeks, describes the exhibition in Hanoi on March 6 of Lieut. Comdr. Richard A. Stratton, a Navy pilot who was shot down in North Vietnam in January.

"Repeated" Hanoi Assurances

The article said the Navy man "looked straight ahead, but he wasn't really looking — his eyes never seemed to focus — he just wasn't there." "He was 'like a robot,'" Mr. Lockwood wrote, adding: "when they said something to him, he acted; if they said nothing, he did nothing."

humanely."

"However," he said, "it has refused to permit the International Committee of the Red Cross or any other neutral observers to visit the prisoners, which is required by the Geneva conventions."

"In the absence of such independent verifications, 'North Vietnam's professions of humane treatment cannot be accepted.'"

U.S. Plea to Red Cross

Mr. McCloskey contended that the United States and South Vietnam were treating North Vietnamese soldiers captured in the fighting in the South in accordance with the regulations of the 1949 Geneva convention on prisoners of war. Representatives of the International Committee, he said, frequently visit prison camps.

Mr. McCloskey said that in recent weeks the United States had asked the International Committee, which sits in Geneva, to express American concern to the North Vietnamese authorities over indications that prisoners were being subjected to brainwashing techniques.

Washington has also called on the International Committee to ask North Vietnam again to allow the Red Cross or some neutral power to inspect prison camps and to give the prisoners mail and parcels containing medicine and food. Such actions are provided in the Geneva convention. No response has been received.

According to Mr. Lockwood, Commander Stratton, dressed in striped prison pajamas and sandals, read a five-page "confession" over a microphone from behind a curtain while foreign newsmen listened. Copies of the statement were given to the newsmen.

Mr. McCloskey noted that a Japanese television film shown in this country in mid-March confirmed Mr. Lockwood's account of Commander Stratton's demeanor in response to commands.

Prisoner Total Unclear

There are now about 350 American prisoners in North Vietnam. Definitive figures cannot be obtained because the North Vietnamese refuse to provide the Red Cross with lists. Of the total 128 have been confirmed by one means or another as being in North Vietnamese captivity. Four are marines, 63 are Air Force men and 61 are Navy personnel. Fifty other men, all of the Air Force, are believed to have been captured and 204 men are listed as missing in action and possibly captured.

State Department officials said there had been a number of other indications besides the

account in Life that American prisoners were being subjected to brainwashing.

In May 1966, they said, Cmdr. Jeremiah A. Denton Jr., a Navy pilot, was exhibited before Japanese television cameramen in Hanoi. Cmdr. Denton confessed "in the manner of a man who was not himself any more," the officials said, to crimes and made statements critical of American policy.

Since then propaganda statements attributed to 20 other prisoners have been read over the Hanoi radio or distributed through Communist press media. In the statements, all marked by a stilted language, war crimes and denounced the United States' involvement in Vietnam.

Last July a number of American prisoners were paraded through the streets of Hanoi.

Some Appeared Normal

Officials also note that on the dozen or so occasions when the North Vietnamese have allowed Communist or left-wing journalists to interview prisoners, the captured Americans acted reasonably normal, did not make propaganda statements and praised their captors.

No foreigners have been allowed to interview prisoners in their camps.

Officials believe that the North Vietnamese are treating normally a small number of prisoners whose will they feel they cannot break while subjecting the majority to brainwashing tactics.

'He Just Wasn't There'

By PETER GROSE

"He looked straight ahead, but he wasn't really looking — his eyes never seemed to focus — he just wasn't there. It was like a robot — when they said something to him, he acted; if they said nothing, he did nothing."

That was how an American photographer, Lee Lockwood, described Lieut. Comdr. Richard A. Stratton, an American prisoner of war in North Vietnam, who was presented along with his recorded "confession" at a news conference in Hanoi last month.

Mr. Lockwood attended the conference during a visit to North Vietnam on assignment for Life magazine. His pictures and accounts are published in Life's April 7 issue, out today.

The American officer appeared before assembled newsmen and diplomats for only about four minutes. Mr. Lockwood said in a telephone interview, after a recording of his 2,000-word statement had been played. Stiffly and awkwardly during those minutes, Commander Stratton bowed slowly to his right and to his left — "his head reaching down almost to his thighs," Mr. Lockwood said — then, on a quick command from his North Vietnamese captors, he turned and withdrew from the room.

He said nothing, nor were any of the observers able to catch his eye.

Mr. Lockwood and the Hanoi correspondent of Agence France-Presse, Jacques Moalle, were the only Western newsmen attending the news conference, held March 6. There were also

newsmen and diplomats from the Soviet Union, Poland, Cuba and other Communist countries in attendance.

'Frightening Experience'

"A frightening experience," muttered one Frenchman as the group left the room, according to Mr. Lockwood.

"Cubans, Poles — all the non-Vietnamese who saw it expressed their dismay," Mr. Lockwood added, "I told son Vietnamese officials the next day that this would be the worst possible kind of display, as far as American public opinion was concerned."

"Some Vietnamese newsmen denied that Stratton had been given any orders as he stood there," he said, "but several of us heard it quite clearly — a few sharp words from the officer, then the prisoner went into this robot-like bowing."

Mr. Lockwood, a free-lance photographer who works with the Black Star picture agency, spent four weeks in North Vietnam. He obtained his visa through the North Vietnamese Embassy in Havana in January, having applied for it last May. Speaking by telephone in New York, Mr. Lockwood gave this description of the news conference:

"We had one day's notice. They took us to a one-story building in Hanoi — it was an old social club of some kind which was now being used as a military headquarters."

"The conference was held in a long room with French doors looking out into a courtyard. There were three army officers of the Vietnamese War Crimes Commission sitting at a table at the head of the room, and on their left was a curtained doorway. In front of the table was a loudspeaker."

"After some preliminaries one of the officers announced, 'Now we will hear the confession of a United States prisoner.' All the photographers moved over to focus on the doorway, but they told us to go back to our places — we would hear the statement over the loudspeaker before seeing the prisoner."

Five Typewritten Pages

"I am Richard Allen Stratton, a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy attached to... U.S.S. Ticonderoga," the voice said over the loudspeaker. As the recording was played, copies of the statement, covering five single-spaced typewritten pages, were distributed in English, French and Vietnamese.

"His voice sounded alert, sincere and intelligent," Mr. Lockwood said. "There was not much expression in his reading, but this I put down to his training in military briefing — he certainly did not sound like a man without any personality."

"I expected to see a man matching that voice come through the curtain — I was not prepared to see the sort of man who ultimately appeared."

In the recorded statement, Commander Stratton described a series of missions undertaken from the Ticonderoga starting Nov. 14.

"The second of December was to be an air-wing strike on the suburbs of Hanoi," Commander Stratton's statement said. "This was an extremely important mission necessary to make the

AMERICAN P.O.W.'S U.S. Fears Hanoi Is Brainwashing Prisoners

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Some Appeared Normal

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No foreigners have been allowed to interview prisoners in their camps.

Officials believe that the North Vietnamese are treating normally a small number of prisoners whose will they feel they cannot break while subjecting the majority to brainwashing tactics.

U.S. Plea to Red Cross

Mr. McCloskey contended that the United States and South Vietnam were treating North Vietnamese soldiers captured in the fighting in the South in accordance with the regulations of the 1949 Geneva convention on prisoners of war. Representatives of the International Committee, he said, frequently visit prison camps.

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"Antipersonnel weapons were chosen to inflict maximum damage on the population. The best part of the day was chosen for maximum effect on the population," the prisoner told the Hanoi news conference.

I Was Horrified

"I was horrified at the density of buildings and population the target. Bombs were scattered over the entire south side of the city. Privately most of the pilots were appalled at the pacific nature of the target. I not only did not have the courage to refuse to go on the mission, but I did not have the courage to speak out against the mission or at the policy."

Then Commander Stratton described his second mission on Hanoi, on Dec. 14. He said an American flier refused to participate in a raid which struck women and children. That confession, according to the record statement, was dismissed as a bid to report to his commanding officer.