

Air Force unconcerned for humans,

SAN DIEGO — Dr. John Plag is a quiet-voiced, scholarly researcher-psychologist who has a habit of saying things that tend to make people mad at him.

"If you write this down, it probably is going to get me in a lot of trouble," the director of the Center for Prisoner of War Studies said in an interview last week. "But go ahead. I've always hedged on the question before but I have a defi-

nite opinion and if it causes me trouble, I'm ready to live with it."

The question was why doesn't the Air Force participate in the important research at the center, which is trying to improve American servicemen's chances of survival in future POW camps.

The question seems pertinent inasmuch as over half of the 591 returned POWs were Air Force personnel.

There is, of course, the traditional inter-service rivalry, although the Army, Navy and Marines seem to have overcome that here.

The blunt-talking Plag has another, more basic reason:

"The Army and the Navy are very much concerned about the welfare of human beings," he said. "They have a long history of it, a tradition of taking care of their own and others.

"But, I suppose because of being a Johnny-come-lately in the military services, the Air Force does not have this kind of a history. They just don't have that concern for the welfare of human beings."

As a result, he said, the Air Force has not participated in POW research here nor has it followed up on research on programs for Air Force POW and MIA families.

says feisty psychologist

"It's not right but that's the way it is," said Plag.

Nor does Plag mind picking fights with the media — even with such industry giants as the New York Times.

"I don't know what your politics are," he said. "But I can tell you I sure don't like theirs — and they frequently get their facts screwed up."

He blames the Times for scuttling a unique re-

search project the center wanted to do involving crew members of the U.S.S. Pueblo, the spy ship captured by the North Koreans in 1968.

The program would have medically and psychologically compared Pueblo crewmembers to the crew of another spy ship, the Banner. The Banner was on the same spy mission as the Pueblo providing a ready-made control group for re-

search purposes, Plag said.

But the Times found out and headlined it on page one: "Navy to reopen Pueblo Inquiry."

"That was absolutely wrong of course, but because of that damned story, the research project probably won't go ahead at this time."

The project is still on the drawing boards but Plag said "it is too hot now. . . dammit."