

'They Take Risks to Get Us the Facts'

Among the hundreds of men still missing in Southeast Asia as a result of the Vietnam war is a group of international journalists who were not directly involved in that war but were reporting its events to the world. They were unarmed non-combatants, trying to get at the truth of what was happening. They disappeared in the midst of their story and no word has been heard of them since.

Now evidence has come that these journalists, most of whom have been missing in Cambodia for more than three years, are indeed alive and are being held prisoner in Cambodian jungle camps.

At least, some of them are alive. They were seen. They were heard. And, most important, they are being complained about. Whatever you hear a good solid gripe, you can be sure there is something substantive behind it.

These new reports come mostly from returned South Vietnamese ARVN prisoners who were held in camps near the newsmen. They were told that "foreign journalists" were in other areas of the compounds. They say they saw bearded "long-nosed" Caucasians doing roadwork and tending pigs. They complained that these foreigners were getting better food and better treatment. It made the South Vietnamese angry.

The new sightings excite and encourage the rest of us because they tell us that our men live. Or were alive in March this year, at least, before the bombing resumed over Cambodia.

Twenty international newsmen are missing in war-torn Cambodia. Seventeen disappeared in the spring of 1970. They were reporting the war's expansion for television, international wire services, radio and magazines. Three are American, including my husband Welles; seven are Japanese, four French, one German, one Austrian and one Swiss. Last year, two more Americans and an Australian disappeared. (Other Americans missing are Alexander Shimkin of Newsweek; Terry Reynolds, United Press International; Dana Stone, CBS News; and Sean Flynn, Time.)

Other than the important knowledge that most of our men were seen captured alive, we have had nothing to go on except for an occasional sighting, without description or identity, for 37 months.

But now we have new facts. They are slim, but they are solid.

One returned ARVN Vietnamese soldier says that he was walking on Route 7 about 17 miles south of Snoul in eastern Cambodia a year ago along with 120 other ARVN prisoners, guarded by 30 North Vietnamese, when two Honda motorcycles pulling wooden carts, country-taxi fashion, passed by an unobstructed distance of a few yards. He saw six long-haired bearded Caucasians under guard in the two motorcycle taxis. The soldier asked his North Vietnamese guard if the men were American advisers and was told: "No, they are correspondents of the imperialist side."

The writer's husband, Welles Hangen, was NBC bureau chief in Hong Kong when he disappeared in Cambodia May 31, 1970.



airstrip just south of Route 13 in Kratie Province. Our informant says he believes the camp was being used as a regional headquarters of the Sihanouk forces and not primarily as a prison camp. He was able to watch the Caucasians at various times from a distance of a few yards and says that they were well treated by the Cambodian guerrilla forces and had adequate medical care and food. He reports that the 10 alleged journalists were housed in a long stucco building and was told that each man had his own partitioned compartment. There were 28 Cambodian prisoners held in the same camp but none was allowed to mingle with the Caucasians. This informant also says that he was told repeatedly by camp guards that the Caucasians were foreign journalists.

Another report comes to us as recently as March of this year. An ARVN soldier then detained by the North Vietnamese also in eastern Cambodia says he was told by one of his guards that foreign journalists were being held somewhere in the area. It is interesting to note that although these ARVN soldiers were captured in South Vietnam, they were taken to prison compounds in Cambodia for detention. All of our information concerning the missing journalists comes from Cambodia. We believe, therefore, that our men are still there.

Full credit for bringing these facts to light goes to the Committee to Free Journalists Held in Southeast Asia, a group headed by Walter Cronkite. One member, a young American newsman named Zalin Grant, travelled to Saigon and Phnom Penh and interviewed over 3,000 ARVN returnees and others to get this information. Thanks to Grant's zealous search for his colleagues, we now can say: "We now know that our men are alive and being held prisoner. We want to know why. We want them located. We want them released and we want them home."

For three years, journalists, statesmen and concerned individuals and groups in many countries have probed steadily for information and prodded for the release of the missing newsmen. Never before have journalists been detained, with no word of confirmation of their capture or explanation of their fate. All over the world voices have been raised demanding answers. Detention of newsmen deprives people on every side of the political spectrum from getting the facts. Silencing reporters stifles the truth. Or, in this case, diminishes—at least for a while—the number of voices bringing us the truth.

Another ARVN prisoner relates a conversation he had with a Vietcong captain during his detention in a camp near Mimot in eastern Cambodia in July 1972. The captain said that the Vietcong had captured and were holding American, Japanese and French journalists. He even said that some of the journalists had cameras.

A Cambodian national who spent 15 days of June 1972 in a guerrilla camp run by Prince Sihanouk's FUNK soldiers in eastern Cambodia says he saw 10 Caucasian detainees who were identified to him by camp guards as foreign journalists. The camp was situated in a former Royal Cambodian Army compound adjoining an unused

Why this infringement of freedom of information? Why were these newsmen on the spot in the first place? Why did they take the risks that stole life work has been devoted to one belief: a belief in the right of the world's people to be accurately informed about the events which affect us all. He believes that truthful information gives each the knowledge necessary to assess the rights and wrongs of what goes on around us, to determine the responsibility each has to strike out against the wrongs. We can't get all the truths ourselves. But good, dedicated newsmen and women can and do, for us.

We were together in Phnom Penh the week before Welles disappeared. We talked a lot about the dangers of reporting a war, especially where information is not easily available and newsmen must go into the countryside and see for themselves.

"We always ask," Welles explained to me. "When we drive along a road, we ask in every village, at every checkpoint. If there's hostility around, we go back. Nobody's looking for trouble."

But on May 31, 1970, they found it anyway. Welles and NBC cameramen Yoshihiko Waku and Roger Colne slowed their car at a Cambodian army checkpoint on Route 8 leading toward Takco to ask their usual questions, but they were waved through. With no warning, they drove straight into an ambush. But we know they survived and were taken prisoner by Vietcong soldiers. They were seen being led off into the jungle. We have heard nothing specific since — until now.

No one knows which newsmen may be those seen by Zalin Grant's returnees. I pray that all 20 are involved. We know, in any case, that some are indeed alive and are being held prisoner. We must help them to come back.

Certainly most reporters who involve themselves in covering foreign wars, and indeed our own problems and scandals at home, share Welles' belief. Each day they take risks to get us the facts we need. Without such facts we would feel helpless and consequently apathetic. But with them we can make up our own minds about what is right and what is wrong and do something about it.

If we don't, if each of us doesn't do his own part to make our world better, then the 45 newsmen who died in Southeast Asia while trying to supply us with the knowledge they considered it our *right* to have—and the 20 newsmen who are still waiting in Cambodian jungle camps for release and the opportunity to continue reporting the truths we *need*—will have died—or waited—in vain.

I plead for their release. Even more, I plead for each of us to understand the responsibilities these men have been trying to make clear to us, and to do what we can to act. Nothing will please Welles and the other missing newsmen more when they return than to know that we have been doing this, and that these three years have not been entirely wasted.