

The Missing Newsmen -- Alive in Cambodia?

(Patricia Hangen is the wife of Welles Hangen, veteran foreign correspondent, who was NBC bureau chief in Hong Kong at the time of his disappearance May 31, 1970.)

By Patricia Hangen

Among the hundreds of men still missing in Southeast Asia as a result of the Vietnam War is a group of international journalists.

They were unarmed non-combatants who disappeared, and no word has been heard of them since.

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

At least some of them are alive. They were seen. They were heard. And they are being complained

about.

These new reports come mostly from returned South Vietnamese ARVN prisoners who were held in camps near the newsmen.

They said they saw bearded "long-nosed" Caucasians doing roadwork and tending pigs. They complained that these foreigners were getting better food and better treatment.

This news indicates that the men live — or were alive in March this year, at least, before the bombing over Cambodia resumed.



WELLES HANGEN
Ambushed in 1970



eign journalists.

Credit for bringing these facts to light goes to the Committee to Free Journalists Held in Southeast Asia, a group headed by Walter Cronkite and made up of professionals concerned with the fate of their colleagues.

One member, a young American newsman named Zalin Grant, traveled to Saigon and Phnom Penh and interviewed more than 3000 ARVN returnees and others to get this information.

Why this infringement of freedom of information? Why were these newsmen on the spot in the first place? Why did they take the risk?

I know why Welles was there. His work has been devoted to a belief in people's right to be accurately informed about the events.

We were together in Phnom Penh the week before Welles disappeared. We talked about the dangers of reporting a war.

"We always ask," Welles explained. "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 Cone slowed their car at a Cambodian army checkpoint to ask their usual questions, but they were waved through. With no warning, they drove into an ambush.

We know they were taken prisoner by Viet Cong soldiers. They were seen being led off into the jungle.

No one knows which newsmen may be those seen by Zalin Grant's returnees.

Most reporters who involve themselves in covering foreign wars take daily risks to get the facts. With these we can make up our own minds about what is right and what is wrong and do something about it.

I plead for the release of the journalists. Even more, I plead for each of us to understand the responsibilities these men have been trying to make clear to us.

sional sighting, for 37 months.

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

One returned ARVN Vietnamese soldier said that he was walking on Route 7 in Eastern Cambodia a year ago, along with 120 other ARVN prisoners guarded by 30 North Vietnamese, when two motorcycles pulling wooden carts passed by him a few yards away.

He saw six long-haired, bearded Caucasians under guard in the two carts. The soldier asked his North Vietnamese guard if the men were American advisers and was told: "No, they are correspondents of the imperialist side."

Another ARVN prisoner related a conversation he had with a Viet Cong captain during his detention in a camp in eastern Cambodia in July 1972. The captain said that the Viet Cong had captured and were holding American, Japanese and French journalists.

A Cambodian national, who spent half of June 1972 in a guerrilla camp run by Prince Sihanouk's FUNK soldiers in eastern Cambodia, said he saw ten Caucasian detainees identified to him by camp guards as for-

Twenty international newsmen are missing in Cambodia. Seventeen disappeared in the spring of 1970.

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 than the important knowledge that most of our men were seen captured alive, we have had nothing to go on, except for an occa-