

# U.S. RESCUE FORCE LANDED WITHIN 23 MILES OF HANOI, BUT IT FOUND P.O.W.'S GONE



The New York Times (by Mike Lien)  
Arthur D. Simonds, the Army colonel who led the raid, with Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird at the conference.

## ACCOUNT BY LAIRD

### Reds in Paris Cancel a Session of Peace Talks in Protest

NOV 24 1970

Text of Laird's statement  
is printed on Page 12.

By WILLIAM BEECHER  
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 23 — Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird disclosed today that a small task force of Army and Air Force men landed about 23 miles west of Hanoi over the weekend in an unsuccessful attempt to free American prisoners thought to be held there.

The raid, Secretary Laird said at a news conference, was staged at about 2 A.M. Saturday Hanoi time (1 P.M. Friday, New York time), an hour or so before about 250 fighter-bombers attacked air-defense and supply targets in the southern panhandle region of North Vietnam. Mr. Laird said the two missions were unconnected.

Secretary Laird said the commando-type raid, which was the first directed at a prisoner-of-war camp in North Vietnam, had been approved by President Nixon after he was told this month that some prisoners were dying.

#### Prisoners Were Moved

The raiding party, which landed in helicopters at the prisoner compound at Sontay, discovered that the prisoners had been moved away.

In Paris, the North Vietnamese and Vietcong delegations called off the session of

#### "Army Green Berets"

SF Examiner, 24 Nov 70  
SF Chronicle, 25 Nov 70  
SF Chronicle, 26 Nov 70

the peace talks that had been scheduled for Wednesday, to protest the American attacks.

Secretary Laird called a news conference at 3:30 P.M. after a morning news briefing at the Pentagon had left reporters with the impression that United States aircraft might have staged strikes in the Hanoi-Haiphong area over the weekend, as has been charged by the Hanoi radio.

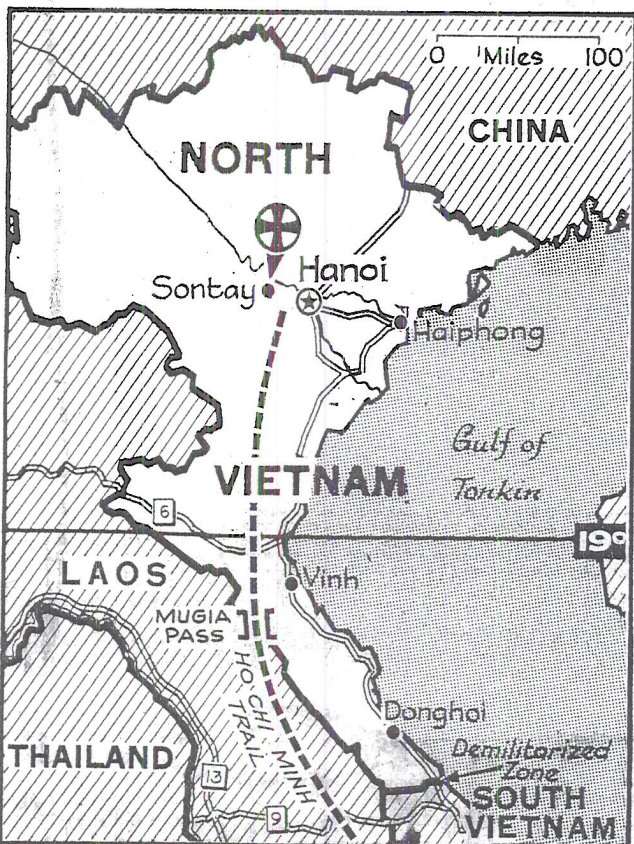
At the morning briefing, a Defense Department spokesman, Jerry W. Friedheim, steadfastly refused to say whether American aircraft had also operated north of the 19th Parallel during heavy weekend raids south of that point.

#### Many Details Withheld

"I want to give now the details of the only operation that took place north of the 19th Parallel this past weekend," Mr. Laird began.

He then presented a guarded description of the exploit. The Defense Secretary and the officers who were in charge of the mission declined to say how many men had participated, precisely where they had operated from, or whether they had

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# U.S. Rescue Force Landed 23 Miles From Hanoi

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brought any enemy hostages back with them.

But Mr. Laird expressed belief that if there had been any American prisoners at the compound, "they would be free men today."

Recalling unsuccessful diplomatic attempts to obtain an exchange of American prisoners for North Vietnamese and Vietcong prisoners, Mr. Laird left open the question whether similar rescue operations might be attempted in North Vietnam in the future.

"This daring mission," he said, indicates "our dedication" to the American prisoners, "and we will do everything that we can in our power to accomplish their early release."

## White House Statement

However, at a subsequent White House news conference, Ronald L. Ziegler, the presidential press secretary, said in answer to a question: "If you are asking if the President intends to conduct activities in North Vietnam with ground personnel, the answer is no. We do conduct search and rescue efforts for downed pilots."

Mr. Laird said that Navy fighters had dropped flares along the North Vietnamese coast during the commando raid as a diversionary tactic. In all, he said, at least 30 surface-to-air missiles were fired against the diversionary force,

and he expressed belief that these weapons may have caused "considerable damage," presumably when they fell back to the ground.

His implication was that Hanoi's charges of bombing were actually the result of damage done by its own defensive missiles landing in populated areas.

The Government believes that there are 378 American military men held prisoner in North Vietnam. Altogether 780 men are listed as missing in Vietnam, and 1,500 in all of Southeast Asia, some of whom are presumed to be prisoners as well.

## Fighter Planes Assisted

Pentagon sources disclosed that a force of protective fighters accompanied the raiding party and might have fired at defensive installations, including a guard tower, in the prisoner camp.

Mr. Ziegler said that President Nixon felt the possible gains of the mission had been worth the risk.

He said the White House did not expect North Vietnam to take reprisals against the prisoners it holds, and added: "We would of course hold the North Vietnamese leaders personally responsible for any action taken against prisoners of war."

In the morning news conference, Mr. Friedheim disclosed that about 200 fighter-bombers and about 50 support planes had taken part in raids south of the 19th Parallel. This was

about half the size of the strike force that raided similar air-defense and other targets last May 2 and 3, he said.

It is understood that the bombing strikes started early Saturday morning, Hanoi time, and ended about 24 hours later. The main activity was said to have taken place during about seven daylight hours on Saturday. The time in Hanoi is 13 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

## Targets Near DMZ Hit

Mr. Friedheim said that the air raids were against military targets around the "approach routes" to the Mugia and Bankarai Passes and at the northwestern edge of the demilitarized zone astride the border between North and South Vietnam.

The strikes, carried out in retaliation for North Vietnamese attacks on unarmed reconnaissance aircraft, were against missile and anti-aircraft gun sites and "related facilities," he declared.

Mr. Friedheim, under questioning, said such related facilities might well have included trucks, ammunition dumps, petroleum storage facilities, missiles and even troop barracks in "proximity" to air-defense sites.

Initial reports by pilots on the missions told of 100 or more secondary explosions and about 100 trucks destroyed, he said. In answer to questioning, he agreed that this might "ham-

per" North Vietnamese offensive activities in South Vietnam.

Mr. Friedheim confirmed reports that bad weather had delayed the start of the raids.

"Appropriate" members of Congress were apprised of the strikes as they "were occurring," the Pentagon spokesman said. He declined to say which legislators had been informed, however.

## Leaders of Raid Give Account

Mr. Ziegler said that President Nixon planned to meet late today with the two officers most directly involved in planning and executing the rescue attempt in North Vietnam.

They are Brig. Gen. Leroy J. Manor of the Air Force, who was in over-all charge, and Col. Arthur D. Simons of the Army, who actually led the raiding party on the ground. Both officers were present at Mr. Laird's news conference and joined with him in answering newsmen's questions.

Colonel Simons reported that "a slight amount of ground fire" was received by the raiders as they swept into the prison compound. One of the helicopters was crash-landed and was later destroyed by members of the raiding party as they left, he said.

None of the party's members was killed, but one man was wounded by fire from an AK-47 automatic rifle, the colonel, who has spent much of his career in Ranger and Special Forces assignments, told the newsmen.