

A280WX

lbylryyrczcc WX Laird-Pows

Laird Chronology Box 200

WASHINGTON AP - Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said Tuesday he recommended to President Nixon last August that men be trained for a rescue mission such as the one that failed to rescue American prisoners of war in North Vietnam Friday.

Laird told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee contingency planning for the raid proceeded over the period of a year, and the final go-ahead was not given until early last Friday morning.

The final planning was ordered about a week before the order for execution was finally given," Laird said.

That would place the final planning order date at about Nov. 13, the day an unarmed U.S. reconnaissance plane was shot down over North Vietnam.

The raid on a prison camp at Son Tay near Hanoi-which was empty of prisoners when the would be rescuers arrived-occurred at the same time U.S. bombers were striking the north in retaliation against the downing of the reconnaissance plane.

The Pentagon has said there was no connection between the rescue attempt and the bombing, which occurred below the 19th parallel.

Laird also said the raiders determined that the prisoners had been removed from the camp about two weeks before they arrived. This would have been one week before the final planning for the raid was ordered.

CZ8pes nov 24