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Prisoner List 440

By HENRIETTA LEITH

Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK AP - A lawyer and a professor who visited North Vietnam and brought back names of 17 Americans listed as dead accused Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird on Wednesday of distorting the information they brought back. Both men are active in the anti-war effort.

Dr. Sidney Peck, a professor of sociology at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, now on sabbatical and lecturing at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, called Laird's defense of the POW raid in North Vietnam "the most staged hoax that I could imagine." Laird told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that reports of the deaths of American prisoners spurred the raid.

Meanwhile, attorney Peter Weiss charged that information he brought back from North Vietnam regarding 11 Americans listed as dead had been "grossly distorted" by Laird.

Both men said Laird had no basis for inferring that the Americans had died while actually in North Vietnamese prison camps.

Weiss said, "It could mean they were dead on hitting the ground, or found dead after wandering around in the mountains for weeks after they crashed, or died from wounds suffered while they were being shot down."

Dr. Peck, reached by telephone at Cambridge, Mass., said the information he brought back contained no indication how the Americans had died and "no one from the Department of Defense or State Department ever made any effort to contact me" to find out if he had further information.

Peck accused Laird of trying to use the list of dead, provided by the North Vietnamese at the request of the relatives of missing Americans, "as a pretext for escalating the war in North Vietnam."

Weiss said six of the 17 names were from Peck's list, which was made available to Washington officials Nov. 13 just after Peck's return from Hanoi, but 11 of the 17 were from the list brought back by Weiss on Sunday night. 22 Nov

He said his names were telephoned to the State Department only Monday morning, after the raid on a camp near Hanoi which turned out to be unoccupied.

In his testimony in Congress on Tuesday, 24 Nov Laird said the decision to carry out the raid was made Nov. 20, which is a week after the first list of six names was made available. Laird also said the 11 new names became available subsequently.

Weiss said the names were given to him in response to long-standing pleas from wives of missing Americans to "at least tell us whether we are wives or widows."

Weiss, a member of the antiwar Lawyers' Committee on American Policy Toward Vietnam, made the trip to North Vietnam on the invitation of a jurists' association there.

Dr. Peck, cochairman of the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, was invited to Hanoi by a North Vietnamese committee seeking "solidarity" with U.S. antiwar groups.

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