



The New York Times (by Mike Lien)

**PRESIDENT HONORS RAIDERS:** Mr. Nixon pinning the Distinguished Service Cross on Sgt. 1st Cl. Tyrone J. Manor, T. Sgt. Leroy M. Wright, who injured his foot on raid near Hanoi, and Col. Arthur D. Simons, right rear, who led raiding party in vain effort to free prisoners. Others honored, from left: Brig. Gen. Leroy J. Adderly.

Manor, T. Sgt. Leroy M. Wright, who injured his foot on raid near Hanoi, and Col. Arthur D. Simons, right rear, who led raiding party in vain effort to free prisoners.

## How P.O.W. Camp Raid Was Planned

By WILLIAM BEECHER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 25—The planners of the commando raid on a North Vietnamese prison camp last weekend had to take into account the position of the moon and Soviet satellites and to gather men from all over the world.

Details of the raid on the prisoner-of-war compound at Sontay, which is about 23 miles west of Hanoi, emerged from interviews with knowledgeable officials.

Both the rescue attempt and the air strikes some hours later in the southern provinces of North Vietnam were executed in nearly flawless fashion, the planners said. But both operations fell short of military expectations.

The 50 or so men who landed at 2 A.M. Saturday, Hanoi time, at Sontay soon discovered that the prisoners were no longer at the camp. And

the bombing missions were so hindered by bad weather that they were ended after only about 250 strikes—instead of the planned 500—had been made.

"There were so many complex factors that had to be coordinated," one source said, "weather, the phase of the moon, the availability of Navy fighters to provide diversions and to be ready to bail the team out if it got into MIG trouble."

"The factors simply weren't right until last Saturday," he declared.

"We had to wait for just the right weather window and moon window over Sontay," another source said. "The weather had to be open enough to move in our choppers and have visibility for our covering fighters. The moon had to be just right so that it gave our men enough light in which to operate, but

very little for the enemy to discover their approach. It was just a coincidence that the rescue effort at Sontay and the air raids in the southern panhandle came during the same weekend."

A waning half-moon was up when the raiders swept in with about 10 large helicopters from a base in Thailand. Several of the helicopters were empty; they were to have been used to bring out the 70 to 100 prisoners who were thought to have been there.

The sources pointedly refused to say whether any North Vietnamese guards had been captured and brought out for questioning.

Such men might be expected to provide information on when the Americans had been moved from Sontay, the kind of treatment they had received

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there, and procedures normally followed in moving prisoners from one camp to another.

Men had been taken from assignments all over the world for the Sontay mission, one even from behind a Pentagon desk. The bulk of most, however, came from Fort Bragg, N. C., where the Army Special Forces has its headquarters, and Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, home of the Air Force's special air warfare teams.

Most of the training was conducted at Eglin. The planning was so detailed that a full-scale reproduction of the prison camp—the layout gleaned from reconnaissance photos—was constructed and every phase of the operation rehearsed again and again.

#### Mock-Up Camp Destroyed

Then the mock-up prison camp was destroyed for fear, however remote, that Soviet spy satellites might pick it up and relay word to Hanoi that Sontay might be a target for some future American raid of some sort.

"We also didn't want to keep it up any longer than necessary in case any prying eyes at Eglin might see what they weren't supposed to," one source said.

Security was so tight that the planners are convinced there was no advance leak of the mission. Rather, they believe, the prisoners were moved to another camp for prosaic reasons, perhaps because Hanoi felt it could save some money by consolidating two camps into one.

The Sontay raid was not the first time Americans have slipped into North Vietnam during the war. In 1965, Col.

Arthur D. Simons, the man who led the raid on the camp, had been in charge of a group known as SOG-North that had been involved in sending small American and South Vietnamese intelligence teams into the north.

SOG stands for Studies and Operations Group. Its assignment throughout the war has been to move into Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam to gather military intelligence on such things as location of enemy troops, supply dumps and concentration of air defenses.

Colonel Simons, who is 52 years old, has had a long career of difficult special assignments. In 1961, he was in charge of Operation White Star, a combined Central Intelligence Agency - Special Forces effort to organize Meo tribesmen in Laos to harass and spy on Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese activities.

Because of his special experience, Colonel Simons was the man quickly chosen to lead the raid when the attempt was first seriously discussed early this year by senior military men of all four services.

#### Decides on Small Team

They were determined that, since Hanoi had shown no disposition to exchange American prisoners for the 8,000 North Vietnamese and 17,000 Vietcong prisoners in South Vietnam, an effort must be made to free them forcibly.

A total of 378 Americans are believed to be prisoners in North Vietnam and 958 more are missing, some of whom also may be in captivity.

Some senior officers even talked among themselves of an amphibious landing by a Marine

division in North Vietnam aimed at so unnerving Hanoi's leaders they might quickly sue for peace and release all prisoners.

But these and other officers, convinced that the White House would never permit such a widening of the war, argued that the job could be done by small hand-picked teams, using surprise to overwhelm local guards and extricate the prisoners by helicopter.

They laid this second proposal before Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird in late spring or early summer. In August, he approved assembly and training of a special task force, called Joint Contingency Task Group Ivory Coast.

Brig. Gen. Leroy J. Manor, 49, commander of the Air Force Special Operations Force at Eglin, was picked to command the new group. It included about 80 men, sources say, including administrative personnel.

Sontay was one of a half dozen or so prison camps con-

sidered for the mission. It was selected, sources say, largely because it had sufficient flat space around it to permit the landing of enough large helicopters to remove the prisoners thought to be housed inside.

One major concern was that the lumbering helicopters, skimming the treetops on a roundabout route in from Thailand, might be detected and attacked by North Vietnamese MIG fighters, or that the task force might be attacked as it left.

For that reason, a number of diversionary flights were flown by Navy aircraft, dropping flares, jamming North Vietnamese radar and otherwise causing the North Vietnamese to direct much of their air force and attention out to sea during the Sontay raid.

A small force of American jets was kept ready to speed to Sontay if the raiders were attacked by enemy fighters.