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Defector Tells of Camp Raided by U.S.

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SAIGON, Nov. 27 — A defector who in 1967 was an observer at the North Vietnamese prison camp near Sontay raided last weekend by American commandos is reported to have said that the American prisoners were forced to do light manual labor for which they received "decent" daily food allowances.

According to the defector, prisoners in the Lam Son I camp—as the North Vietnamese call it—were assigned to paint the Longbien bridge, the longest in Indochina, at Hanoi about 25 miles from the camp, reportedly trained in basket-weaving and other arts and crafts, while others were assigned to grind rice.

The account of the prison as it was three years ago came from United States psychological warfare officials who interviewed the defector in September, shortly after his defection. The officials prepared a transcript of the interview.

Told of Earlier Times

There was no way of knowing whether the conditions reported in 1967, during the period of bombing of the north, held true for later periods. The prisoners were moved from the camp before the raid.

The defector, identified as Tran Thual, was quoted as having said he was given the task of prison observed after he was instrumental in the shooting down of an American plane. No reason was given for his defection.

"I was appointed to be an observer by the general staff, authorized to visit American prisoners," the defector said in the transcript. "After a three-

month interrogation period the prisoners were brought to the camp, where they were given clothing, shoes and hats.

"They received a daily food allowance of one North Vietnamese piaster a day, which was relatively speaking, decent. Our own artillerymen receive only 0.80 North Vietnamese piaster daily."

"Those who are strong have to grind paddy or process rice. Others weave various kinds of baskets," the defector added.

Work Quotas Established

"Quotas are established for the American prisoners," he said. "For example, one man has to husk about 100 kilograms of rice or must process 100 kilograms of rice. Basket

quotas are established as well." A kilogram is 2.2 pounds.

Mr. Thuan estimated, that there were 800 prisoners in the Lamson camp.

"They were junior officers, for the most part, having the rank of lieutenant or captain," he said. "None of the officers were of senior rank."

Official United States figures list 378 Americans as known prisoners of war, although almost 1,000 others are listed as missing in action.

According to the defector, the Lamson prison camp is near Tong, which has an airfield and military academy, the latter a French military school taken over by the North Vietnamese Government.

Tong is about 2½ miles south of Sontay.