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A U.S. AIDE GIVES PLEDGE ON P.O.W.'S

Tells House Unit They Will
Not Play Combat Role

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 10—In an apparently conciliatory gesture toward North Vietnam, a Defense Department official pledged today that released American prisoners of war would have nothing further to do with Vietnam combat activities.

The statement, made to the House Armed Services Committee, seemed aimed at encouraging Hanoi to release more of its nearly 400 American prisoners.

Hanoi said last month when it freed three captured pilots that one reason more men had not been released was that some former prisoners had been used "in war activities" in Indochina.

Dr. Roger E. Shields, the top Pentagon official dealing with prisoner affairs, said the United States would abide by the Geneva Convention that forbids released prisoners to take part "in active military service."

Article 117 of the convention has been interpreted, Dr. Shields said, as ruling out any participation, "direct or indirect," in support of combat activities.

An Administration official said that some of the nine pilots released before last month were assigned to training missions, which could have been broadly construed as preparing pilots for Vietnam. But the pilots have since been assigned to other jobs not connected with Vietnam, the source said.

None of the men released have ever been sent back to Indochina on combat missions, the source said.

Hanoi also has charged that released prisoners had been used in propaganda attacks on North Vietnam. Dr. Shields said that the way North Vietnam had released the three pilots last month to an antiwar group was "a callous and brutal dis-

play" for propaganda purposes.

Conditions in Camps

In answer to questions, he said that the latest information indicated that prison-camp and living conditions for American prisoners had improved — partly, he said, as the result of American efforts to focus attention on the prisoners.

The chief purpose of Dr. Childs's appearance was to make public, in broad terms, the Pentagon's plan for handling the eventual release of the prisoners. This plan is known by the code name Operation Egress Recap.

Dr. Shields said that the plan was based on the premise that all freed men would require medical attention. He said, "our plans require that all returnees be placed immediately under medical auspices for complete medical check-ups and treatment as necessary."

When the three pilots arrived in New York last month, the Pentagon insisted on carrying out its plans and giving the men medical check-ups, despite the wish of one of them, Lieut. Mark L. Grtley of the Navy, to spend time with his family first. Antiwar spokesmen asserted that the men had been "interned" to avoid possible embarrassing statements.

But Dr. Shields denied this and said the men had all been allowed contact with their families and to give news conferences while undergoing physical examinations and questioning.

Although many committee members praised the Pentagon's efforts, Dr. Shields was chided by several members for various aspects of the prisoner situation.

He was criticized by Representative Otis G. Pike, Democrat of Long Island, for having left open the possibility that freed prisoners might face court-martial proceedings.

Dr. Shields said prisoners were subject to the code of military justice like other servicemen, but another official said later that only in extreme cases would action be taken against returned prisoners.