

# That Phony Hanoi Christmas Show

Along about now, the keepers of our POWs are shooting the big Christmas show in the Meditation and Rumpus Room at the barracks. Having told the American players in their attractive prison garb to flash smiles and get ready to hang the ersatz ornaments on the imitation tree, the director will instruct the non-union cameramen to start grinding. The footage will be shown through the world as testament to the enemy's humanitarianism.

A lot of people will believe this humbug. At the Pentagon, however, there will be a note of both skepticism and anxiety. Each panel of the film Hanoi releases, assuming it does, each still, each word on the voice-over, will be scrutinized and monitored.

The purpose of the Pentagon sleuths will be to compare the appearances of the men and their voices to films and tapes released by the enemy last Christmas, or since then.

What the specialists will be looking for are changes in weight, evidence of harsh treatment, mannerisms and speech that might indicate changes in morale. The families of the men who appear in this mockery will be granted the opportunity to see all the film Hanoi puts out, not just that shown on TV or printed in newspapers and magazines.

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**THIS WILL SURELY** be hell for the families, just as that suffered by the men chosen to represent their fellow prisoners. Their combined dreams of a homecoming by Christmas has dimmed in the confusion of the claims, promises, charges and counter-charges of the cease-fire negotiations.

One can be sure that the POWs have been repeatedly told by their captors that it is their own country, the great U.S.A., that is prolonging the war; that it is the Nixon administration that is keeping them separated from their loved ones. The enemy, of course, controls all the communications at the prison camps. Thus, he can tell his lies without any fear of having them contradicted by the outside world. There is no Voice of America or BBC being received in the prison camps; no periodicals that can counteract the daily and nightly propaganda.

Certain of the pacifist groups and neutral reporters who have been permitted to talk with selected POWs have told of a growing disgruntlement among them. Little wonder! How would you personally react if told day in and day out that your own people were responsible for your being held prisoner; that if your people — who have no way now of "winning" the war — would only pull out of Indochina and dump a president you never met and probably wouldn't like, named Thieu, you could be home with the wife and kids or girl friend by December 25 with a warm kiss and a big cold beer on the side?

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**THERE ARE POCKETS** of dissension appearing also among the families of the POWs, and among those families whose husbands, fathers, sons, brothers are still listed by the Pentagon as Missing In Action. But it is a mark of the inspiring faith of the wives of the hundreds and hundreds of men designated by us as MIA, whose mail and packages have been regularly returned by Hanoi, that only a handful have remarried.

Henry Kissinger's ebullient peace predictions of the end of October — "Peace is at hand" — must be salt in the wounds of the POWs and their loved ones. Now the "one more meeting" has turned into many, and there is doubt where there was high hope.

It will take a great miracle to produce the kind of Christmas they were all dreaming of. The pictures of the familiar knot of POWs, "making merry" behind barbed wire should cause all of our carefree joy at Christmas-time to stick in our throats.