

Capture of B-52 Pilots Recounted by Hanoi

WSX POST

From News Dispatches

21 DEC 72

SAIGON, Dec. 20—Three parachutes split the moonlit sky in an area northwest of Hanoi. Scores of militiamen ran to a field where the pilots would land.

"Just then, a huge heavy thing crashed nearby, causing a deafening explosion and a big fire."

That was the account given today by the Vietnam News Agency of the capture of three American B-52 crewmen Monday night.

One American crewman was captured seconds after landing, the account continued. Another was found entangled in a bamboo tree. He was dead. The third American was found after an all-night search, captured while using his rescue signal radio.

The dead man was buried. The two others were led away "to the Hanoi Hilton where they would have to spend Christmas this year with many other U.S. pilots," the agency reported. The Hanoi Hilton is a POW camp so named by U.S. pilots.

Hanoi has claimed five B-52s have been shot down since the United States resumed its massive bombing of the North above the 29th parallel Monday night.

The U.S. command has acknowledged the loss of three of the eight-engined bombers, and said seven crewmen from two planes lost over the North are missing. Six B-52 crewmen were presented to a news conference Tuesday in Hanoi.

According to the Hanoi radio account, the U.S. bombers came over Monday night "as a pale, milky light fell over the villages in District K, Vinhphu Province. Gong and drum beats spread from one village to another, alerting the villagers against approaching enemy planes."

A village chief identified as Lam said "Glowing flak was streaking across the sky.

There was a strange rumble of an engine, unlike the roar of other U.S. jet planes."

"There was a loud explosion. Balls of fire tore up into the air. Our missile. It's hit! Go after the pilots."

Lam said the first crewman they came upon was trying to untangle himself from his parachute's cords and did not notice the approaching militiamen.

"He was quickly disarmed and tied up," Lam said.

The dead crew member had "many injuries and burns on his body," Lam added.

The third crewman was found the following morning, after an all-night search, hiding in a concrete drainage ditch, according to the agency report.

"The chief of Village P," the report continued, "together with a group of militiamen dragged him out from the drain. He was caught while trying to radio for help."

In an account of still another capture, radio Hanoi broadcast an interview with a villager who found an American pilot:

"I knew the American air pirate was still around some place. I saw the prints of him on the wet ground. The prints did not go too far.

"They stopped about 10 feet away from where they started. I continued looking and there I saw laying buried between two rows of dirt mounds an American pilot.

"He had tried to cover his entire body with dirt but unfortunately his head was still showing so we found him.

"He was very scared. He was quivering. We ordered him to take off his clothes and tied him with a rope.

"When we asked where was his weapon he made signs to us that he had hidden it and we finally found it buried in the ground."