

The Chicago Sun-Times reported yesterday that Defense Department documents show that the return of U.S. prisoners has been "carefully orchestrated from a publicity standpoint," but Defense Department officials deny that returnees have been ordered to give special thanks to President Nixon.

The Defense Department plan says that press interviews are not authorized until the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs approves them. It specifically states, "We will obtain this clearance for you if you desire such an interview. You are not required to talk with newsmen or to pose for pictures. To decline is fully within your rights."

Yesterday's New York Times<sup>⊗</sup> reported in a news analysis that many officers at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines clearly believe that the returnees' conduct has set the stage for a restoration of unchallenged patriotism and of the status of the military man to his honored place. The Times said that if this is indeed the case it will have been no accident but a result of careful military planning. The article noted that the captured men were predominantly career officers and fighter-bomber pilots and it said, "probably the most enthusiastic of American warriors."

The Times also pointed out that the military's repatriation effort was carefully programmed and controlled to ensure that all would be retrieved without a hitch. It said that nothing was done or said that "would tarnish the prisoners' image" and that everything was done and said to enhance it. The Times said that this meant keeping a safe distance between the press and the returnees and that the widespread distrust of the press made this relatively easy.

No reporters were allowed to fly to Hanoi or Saigon aboard the medical pickup planes, to photograph, interview or even to observe silently, although there were extra places on those flights. Those few returnees who requested to speak with reporters from hometown newspapers were reportedly refused permission to do so. According to the Times they were allowed to receive written questions and counselled on which ones to answer, and their answers were then censored. When returnees asked what they could say, suggestions were reportedly offered and a rough draft was prepared. As a result, the Times said, all four of the initial spokesmen from Hanoi used similar language in thanking the Commander in Chief and the American people.

<sup>⊗</sup>Story, by James P. Sterba, appeared in NYTimes 20 Feb 73.

KPFA's error in the date caused by the fact they were apparently quoting from SFChronicle, which did not carry the story until 22 Feb 73.