

**Victor Lasky**

# A Vicious Smear In the Press Over the POWs

**Washington**

**T**HE MEDIA defamation of the Nixon Administration continues unabated.

Now such newspapers as the New York Times and the Washington Post are trying to make it appear that the four Navy officers who had made patriotic statements following their release from North Vietnamese prisons had been coached on what to say by U.S. officials.



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The Times has been particularly outrageous. Unable to comprehend why returning POWs, almost without exception, have been consistently thanking the American people, and most particularly President Nixon, for not having forgotten them, the Times posits the thesis that they must have been under orders to say what they did.

Moreover, according to a Times editorial, "The military authorities evidently imposed an invidious form of censorship,

not in the interest of the POWs or of national security but for obscure and self-serving political reasons.

"As a result, a moving human event was reduced to military ceremonies scripted by uniformed press agents. History will therefore remember the occasion largely as a succession of military hand salutes, stiffly prepared statements, medical bulletins and canned handouts concerning the joys of steak and ice cream."

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**T**HIS IS sheer viciousness, unparalleled even for the Times. What is it that the Times would have substituted for the simple welcome-home ceremonies which even had hardboiled correspondents — including its own—weeping at the scene?

Would the Times' editorial board have substituted a welcoming committee consisting of Jane Fonda, Ramsey Clark, Bella Abzug and Tom Wicker?

Did the Times really expect the returning prisoners to mouth its editorials and excoriate President Nixon with the vicious rhetoric that now marks a once great newspaper?

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**T**HE TIMES editorial appeared after four Navy captains who had made patriotic statements on their release by Hanoi publicly stated that no one had coached them on what to say.

One of the captains, Jeremiah A. Denton Jr., the first POW to deplane at Clark Air Base in the Philippines, had stated at the time: "We are profoundly grateful to our Commander in Chief and to our nation for this day." Pausing for a moment, he had added in a voice quivering with emotion: "God bless America!"

Back home, Denton was particularly incensed by an article written by Robert Maynard, "Ombudsman" for the Washington Post, which suggested that the homecoming had been orchestrated by the government, "a military managed event down to the last 'God Bless America.'"

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**C**APTAIN DENTON was being too kind. Maynard's piece was manufactured out of whole cloth to conform to the Nixon-hating editorial policy of the Washington Post for the past quarter of a century.

Only last January 7 this newspaper stated flatly: "(Nixon) has conducted a bombing policy . . . so ruthless and so difficult to fathom politically as to cause millions of Americans to cringe in shame and to wonder at their President's very sanity."

The Post has yet to concede that it was that very "bombing policy" which demonstrably produced the cease-fire that led to the release of the POWs. And it has yet to apologize to the President for questioning his "very sanity."

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**N**O WONDER then that there is increasing evidence that a majority of the American people are beginning to question the kind of editorial judgments they have been receiving from America's predominantly liberal national media.

As Barry Goldwater put it so well:

"No President has been under more constant and unremitting harassment by men who should drop to their knees each night to thank the Almighty that they do not have to make the same decisions that Richard Nixon did."

Unfortunately, despite the President's incredible performance in waging peace and not war, the Nixon-can-do-only-wrong propaganda continues in the media.

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