

SFChronicle
Parade, Luncheon in S.F.

Son Tay POWs, Berets

By Charles Howe

A group of former American prisoners in Vietnam and the Green Berets who tried to free them*whipped through the Financial District in a fast

28-minute parade and then had lunch yesterday.

The affair was part of a weekend celebration sponsored by Texas millionaire H. Ross Perot to commemorate the abortive Son Tay

prison raid of November 20, 1970.

Montgomery street was awash in yards of tickertape — gathered beforehand by the Chamber of Commerce — as the 73 raiders and 66

ex-POW's were whisked past a cheering noontime crowd of several thousand persons.

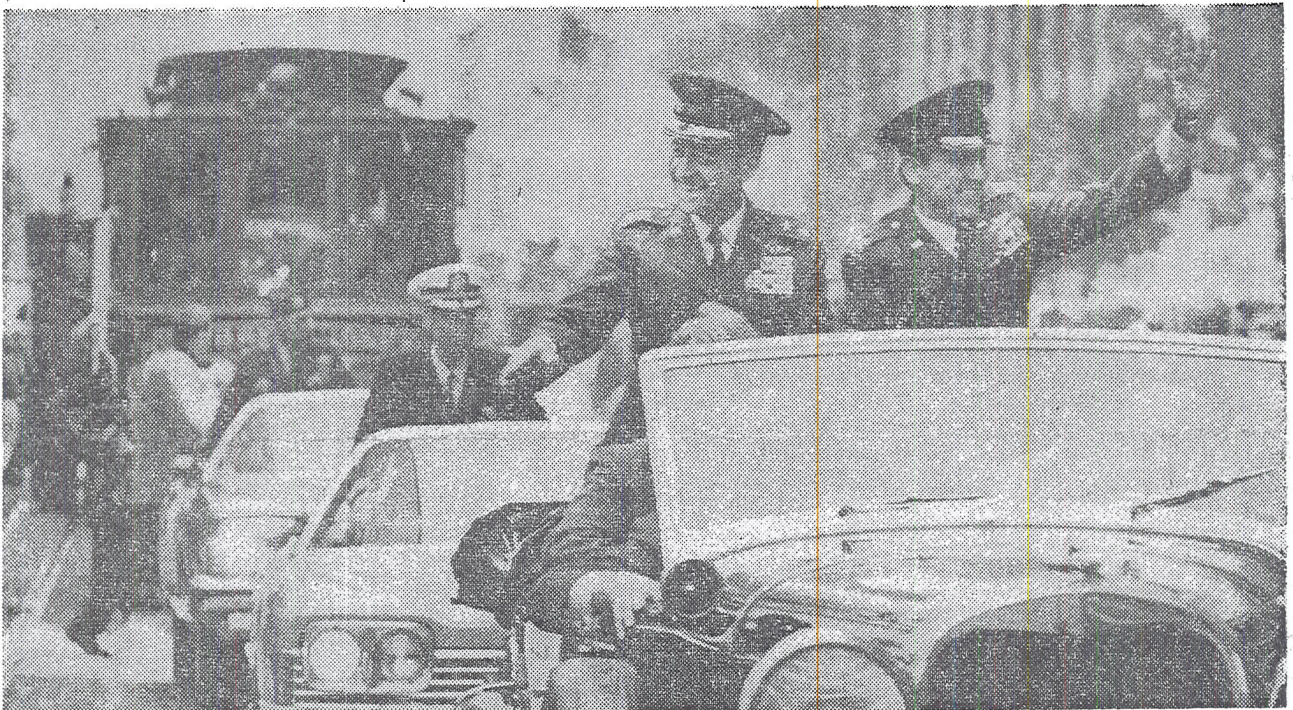
MISSION

At the luncheon for the men held in the Hilton Hotel's Continental Ballroom before

* Separate file: CIA - Green Berets



A Green Beret who made the Son Tay raid was embraced by a flag-waving woman



Major General Leroy Manor, who planned the raid, and Colonel Robinson Risner, a former POW, enjoyed the ride through the Financial District

Meet

a crowd of more than 760 persons, a number of guests praised the mission that had failed. The mission failed because weeks earlier the North Vietnamese had abandoned the camp and had moved prisoners 65 miles north.

Actor John Wayne likened the Son Tay raid to "another Alamo . . . an Iwo Jima." He praised what he called "old-fashioned guts."

Ernest Borgnine, master of ceremonies and star of television's "McHale's Navy," beamed at the men. "In my kind of Navy they call that, 'well done, gentlemen.'"

TORTURE

And comedian Red Skelton, before explaining what the Pledge of Allegiance meant to him, made some remarks about actress Jane Fonda, who has disputed stories of POW torture.

"Some girls, you give them an inch and they think they're rulers . . . she's more fun than a barrel of Mao . . ."

One of the largest bursts of applause, however, was given to the wife of Governor Ronald Reagan. The governor couldn't attend the gathering.

Nancy Reagan read a message from her husband that said:

"Never again let men fight for a cause unless they are allowed to win and use their full resources to achieve victory."

PRAYER

A mildly jarring note came at the beginning of the luncheon when the traditional prayer was recited by a Navy chaplain.

Captain George A. Wright, in paying homage to the raiders and the prisoners, asked God to "preserve us from the expediency that makes for scandal in high places," a remark many members of the press took as a reference to the Watergate affair.

In any case, Wright did not elaborate on the message when later asked about it.

The Green Beret raid was initially criticized in the United States by some who claimed it might have done the prisoners more harm than good.

SUCCESS

But Colonel Robinson Risner, who commanded the prisoners miles north at the 'Hanoi Hilton,' told the audience the mission had been a whopping success.

Speaking of the Green Beret raiders, Risner said: "They didn't get us out but they got us together . . . they got the North Vietnamese a little goosey . . . they moved us all into the infamous Hanoi Hilton and for



H. ROSS PEROT
Millionaire sponsor

the first time we were able to communicate . . . our morale went sky-high!"

Perhaps 35 anti-war protesters gathered outside the hotel to picket the gathering.