

Merry-Go-Round

CIA

Kidnaping, Opium
And a Congressman

Jack Anderson

IN AN international intrigue worthy of James Bond, a mild, bespectacled congressman has been called on by wild Burmese rebels to negotiate the freedom of two kidnaped Russian doctors.

The Capitol Hill 007 is Representative Lester Wolff, (Dem.-N.Y.), who won the Shan guerrillas' confidence last August during a trip to Southeast Asia. As chairman of a House Narcotics Subcommittee, Wolff brought back the Shan's offer to burn 400 tons of opium for \$12 million.

This would have drained the opium from the world market and cut off part of the U.S. heroin supply at the source. Although the State Department rejected the offer, the Shans came to trust Wolff and have now asked him to help out with an even stranger deal.

★ ★ ★

LAST APRIL, at the isolated Burmese village of Taungyi, two humanitarian Russian doctors were working at the Soviet hospital when a force of Shan rebels descended on them and kidnaped them at gunpoint. The rebels, according to our Shan sources, had hoped to grab the Russian Ambassador to Burma who was supposed to be visiting the hospital at the time.

Their purpose was to hold him as ransom for the return of several Shan leaders now in Burmese government custody. Finding no ambassador, they made off

with the two physicians. Our sources say the pair have been moved from one remote camp to another while the Russians and Americans, cooperating secretly, have sought to free them. Meanwhile, the Burmese have refused the kidnap demands.

A few days ago, however, information reached us from the far northern regions of Burma that the rebels were interested in freeing the doctors.

"The two Russian doctors are (with) Kun Siang of the Sua (Shan United Army) who originally captured them," said the cryptic message. "The Russian Embassy in Bangkok has asked (for mediation) with Kun Siang."

★ ★ ★

THE MEDIATOR selected by the Shans is Lester Wolff. They feel if Wolff helps them to work out a fair deal on the Russians, it will increase the Shan's world credibility.

Reluctant at first to leave his congressional chores, Wolff has now decided to do the risky, humanitarian thing. He has agreed to serve as an "honest broker" and fly to the rugged Shan territory, if that is what it takes to free the two doctors.

Footnote: The Shans say they are also willing to burn a ton of opium for Wolff to prove they can deliver the deadly drug in tonnage lots.