

Sanitized Approved For Release CIA-RDP75-000
DEC 26 1966

Americans Held In China Getting Kin's Parcels

By Nicholas Daniloff
United Press International

The telegram from Hong Kong contained only the two words "Delivery routine." But that message brought glad tidings to American Red Cross headquarters this Christmas.

It meant simply, but eloquently, that American prisoners held in Communist China would be receiving their Christmas parcels.

The routine delivery was made Nov. 30. Actually, it is just one more in a series of monthly deliveries that began in 1954 when Peking held 50 Americans.

Today the Communist Chinese hold five. The others have been released over the years upon completion of prison terms for alleged activities against the Communist state.

Capt. Philip E. Smith of Victorville, Calif., was the latest American to fall into Communist Chinese hands when his plane was shot down over the Gulf of Tonkin in September, 1965.

Red Cross authorities managed to get a message to him on Christmas Day last year that his wife had given birth to a baby.

The Red Cross got word from the Red Cross Society of China just a few days ago that Smith was "well and in good health." They said permission had been granted for Smith to receive parcels, too.

The American prisoners are a varied bunch, and are held in different places. Little is known of their daily lives, but word reaches Washington from time to time that they are not being mistreated. Also, they have occasionally been permitted visits from relatives in America.

Bishop Is Oldest

Oldest among the prisoners is Bishop James E. Walsh, 75, a Maryknoll Father from Cumberland, Md. He has served as a Catholic missionary in China on and off since 1918. He was sentenced March 18, 1960, to 20 years' imprisonment for "espionage and subversion."

John T. Downey of New Britain, Conn., and Richard E. Fecteau of Lynn, Mass., were captured by the Chinese when their aircraft was forced down on a flight from Korea to Japan Nov. 29, 1952. They were convicted of espionage. Downey was sentenced to life imprisonment and Fecteau to 20 years.

Huge F. Redmond Jr. of Yonkers, N.Y., was an American businessman in Shanghai until arrested in March, 1952. He was sentenced to life imprisonment.

The Red Cross and the Communist Chinese officials finally reached an agreement at Geneva in 1954 for American prisoners to receive regular parcels.

Each prisoner is now allowed two 11-pound parcels a month. Prepared by the prisoners' families in the United States and by the Red Cross, they contain such items as canned meat, crackers, coffee, sugar, candy, tooth paste, shaving cream and the like.

The Red Cross reports that the Chinese have fully lived up to the agreement. But they are strict about it.

Sam Krakow, director of the Red Cross's international services, said that efforts to establish a similar agreement with the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong have yielded no results.

Quiet Satisfaction

Krakow looks on his contacts with the Communist Chinese over the last 12 years with quiet satisfaction.

"We are constantly in touch with the Chinese. This is a little bridge, and there is not much traffic on it now," he said. "We want to be very careful and maintain the channel."

"One day, if there are more

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important matters, it will still be there and it can be used," he said.

Thus, every month a Red Cross officer flies to the British crown colony of Hong Kong from Tokyo.

There he opens every prisoner parcel, inspects it, and makes sure that its list of contents is precise down to the smallest item.

On the appointed day—the 30th of every month—he crosses the bridge of Wo-lu.

At precisely 11 a.m., an official of the Chinese Red Cross appears on the other side.

"In accordance with the agreement reached between our two national societies, I hereby deliver packages for the American prisoners detained in China. Will you accept them?" The American asks.

The Chinese repeats a standard statement accepting them.

The American returns to Hong Kong, and as the first order of business goes to the telegraph office. There he dispatches the two dramatic words:

"Delivery Routine."