

THE WASHINGTON STAR
4 July 1976

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-7

Milne, John
CIA 4 N. Vietnam
(POW)

70 POW Raid: Did U.S. Fight Chinese, Russians?

By John Milne

United Press International

U.S. commandos raided a North Vietnam POW camp in 1970 despite reports it was empty and killed 100 to 200 Russian or Chinese troops in a battle that erupted when many of the raiders hit the wrong target, an author says.

Benjamin Schemmer, author of a forthcoming book titled "The Raid," said Defense Secretary Melvin Laird and other officials received intelligence

reports that Son Tay camp had been evacuated but launched the Nov. 21, 1970, raid anyway because aerial photos suggested someone might still be there.

Schemmer is editor and publisher of the Armed Forces Journal, a private, unofficial magazine devoted to military affairs written for a military readership.

He said he interviewed raid participants, POWs and intelligence sources. He said none of the volunteers knew the camp might

be empty and, in any event, most of them were landed by helicopter at a heavily guarded antiaircraft training school 600 yards away.

"THE LARGEST PART of the raiding force landed there by mistake and killed 100 to 200 Russian or Chinese troops in a pre-emptive strike that left the school — the raid's ground commander told me — 'blazing like a roman candle,'" Schemmer told UPI.

He said the commandos, in the heat of the battle, could not tell positively whether their opponents were Russians or Chinese.

The other raiders, he said, broke down every door in the deserted POW camp 23 miles west of Hanoi only to find no one there.

Laird announced the raid in a Nov. 23, 1970, news conference, saying there had been no serious U.S. casualties and that President Richard M. Nixon had ap-

proved the raid as a means of saving U.S. prisoners from dying in captivity.

According to Schemmer, 56 Green Beret volunteers flew in by helicopter from Thailand on a 300-mile, ground-hugging course without navigation lights.

THEY EXPECTED to encounter North Vietnamese guards at Son Tay but not the well-armed foreigners at the neighboring school, he said, and a five-minute firefight ensued when most of the party landed there.

Neither Laird nor any other U.S. official mentioned any engagement with Soviet or Chinese troops and no official has admitted publicly there was advance information the camp was empty.

"A handful of officials — but none of the raiders — knew (the prison) had been emptied almost 4½ months earlier," Schemmer said.

Son Tay had held 60 to 70

American POWs as one of North Vietnam's scattered, cramped prison compounds, but Schemmer said the POWs had been removed July 14 because of flooding.

He said U.S. intelligence photos "showed the camp to be increasingly inactive and empty."

About 18 hours before the raid — after Laird sent a "red rocket" message giving the go-ahead — U.S. intelligence got from a carefully cultivated North Vietnamese source the information that Son Tay was empty, Schemmer said.

LAIRD WAS told this, Schemmer said, but chose to launch the raid anyway because infrared sensors on an SR71 reconnaissance plane "flying at above 80,000 feet and over three times the speed of sound showed that someone was back in the prison."

~~SOC 012 The Radio~~
P-Schemmer,
Benjamin
CIA 4 2512-71