

11 February 1985

FILE ONLY

LEBANON

Screen Test

A U.S. hostage's plea

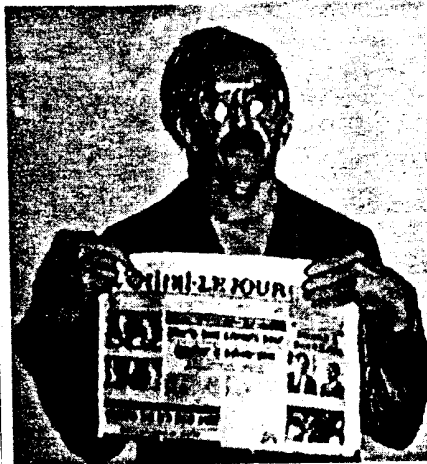
The 56-second tape was apparently filmed by the kidnapers on a home videocassette. Then it mysteriously came into the hands of Visnews, a British television news agency. And last week the footage, showing pale but well-groomed U.S. Diplomat William Buckley standing in front of a bare wall and holding a Beirut newspaper, appeared on TV screens across the U.S. "Today, the 22nd of January 1985, I am well, and my friends Benjamin Weir and Jeremy Levin are also well," said Buckley. "We ask that our Government take action for our release quickly." In response, President Reagan assured reporters that efforts are continuing to free these and two other Americans kidnaped in Lebanon over the past eleven months.

State Department officials were far from delighted by the showing of the tape. According to Spokesman Bernard Kalb, publicity could "unnecessarily complicate [the hostages'] release and perhaps endanger their safety." Indeed, the State Department had seen a similar tape last July, this time of all three captives, but had kept it secret.

Buckley, 56, is a political officer assigned to the U.S. embassy in Beirut. He was kidnaped as he left his apartment in Muslim-controlled West Beirut last March 16 by unidentified gunmen. Levin, 52, Cable News Network's Beirut bureau chief, was abducted from a busy West Beirut street about a week earlier. The kidnapers struck again last May 8, seizing Weir, 60, a Presbyterian minister, as he walked with his wife in the Muslim section. His wife was left behind unharmed. The two other missing Americans are Peter Kilburn, 60, a librarian at the American University of Beirut who vanished on Dec. 3, and Lawrence Jenco, 51, a Roman Catholic priest and head of the Catholic Relief Services in the Lebanese capital, who was captured at gunpoint about four weeks ago.

Anonymous callers to Western news agencies have said that the U.S. captives will be released only when all Americans have departed from Lebanon. At least one caller has threatened that the five will be "tried" and perhaps even executed as members of the Central Intelligence Agency. Says one frustrated U.S. official: "We honestly don't know for sure whom we are dealing with, or where the Americans are, or what we are supposed to do to get them."

Some Washington officials speculate that at least some of the kidnappings were the work of Al Dawa (the Call), an Iraqi Shi'ite fundamentalist group that is thought to have perpetrated the December 1983 bombings of the U.S. embassy and other targets in Kuwait. This would explain offers to free at least some of the Americans in exchange for the release of 17 Shi'ite terrorists imprisoned in Kuwait for the bombings. But many Western diplomats in Beirut believe that another Shi'ite organization, called Hizballah (Party of God), might also be holding the Americans. Callers to Western news agencies have claimed responsibility for the abductions in the name of Islamic Jihad, which is believed to be a *nom de guerre* used by various shadowy Islamic fundamentalist terror groups. ■



Diplomat Buckley on captors' tape

"Take action for our release quickly."