

January 1971

333

NORTH VIETNAM

UNID STATEMENTS
S. W. McLean
McLean

RECENT INTERVIEW FORIC, AMEMBASSY SO.

Source: LUCRIENT in French 29 Dec 67 E 1 E.

[Article in series written by French television reporter Francois Goullais--an exclusive to L'ESPRESSO--titled 'Life in Honor' and describing the reporter's one-month visit to North Vietnam date of the visit not given. The series was announced 25 December and began 27 December. This installment is titled: "The U.S. prisoners do not understand"]

[Excerpts] I met some American prisoners in Hanoi--pilots, often wounded, having ejected from their planes. They--like the Vietnamese they are massaging, but for different reasons--do not understand what has happened to them. Here are some examples of their thoughts:

"He will rebuild your bridges." To this pilot, someone has brought pictures of destroyed bridges. Do you recognize these bridges? Yes, says the pilot, this should have been my work. Then he is shown the same pictures, taken a short while before [the pilot's] pictures. These pictures show many bodies--several bodies--scattered around the bridge. Is this also your work? The American hesitates, then says: It is not my fault if people are foolish enough to pass over bridges while I am bombing. And soon he adds: However I do not understand you. You have only to stop the war. As soon as you do so we will rebuild your bridges. My father is a multimillionaire. I will pay you for them.

Another pilot is injured. The doctor asks him how he feels. He replies: Well. But I must tell you something doctor. You are all quite kind, but your medicines are worthless. Only American medicines are good. You are doing whatever you can, but compared to U.S. centers, you are only beginners. Therefore this is what I suggest: Go have Clark Base in the Philippines where they have everything that is needed. You let me go there, and as soon as I recover I will return here to give myself up.

Downed U.S. pilots energetically refuse to admit that they may have been shot down by Vietnamese pilots--an inferior species in the minds of the American pilots. No, they were hit by SAM missiles or by antiaircraft batteries--but never by MIG pilots. One pilot, for example, is given all the proof that he was hit by one of his Vietnamese counterparts. He defends himself vehemently. Nevertheless, there are respectable pilots. They even bring to his hospital bed the pilot who downed his plane. The American still hesitates, then says: I would have never believed it, not even if it is as you say.

A meeting which will leave its mark on my life:

My meeting with John Sidney McCain was certainly one of those meetings which will affect me most profoundly for the rest of my life. I had asked the North Vietnamese authorities to allow me to personally interrogate an American prisoner. They authorized me to do so. When night fell, they took me--without any precautions or mystery--to a hospital near the Gia Lam Airport reserved for the military. The officer who received me began: I ask you not to ask any questions of political nature. If this man replies in a way unfavorable to us, they will not hesitate to speak of "brainwashing" and conclude that we threatened him.

This John Sidney McCain is not an ordinary prisoner. His father is none other than Admiral Edward John McCain, commander in chief of U.S. Naval Forces in Europe.