Prisoners of War—

The Forgotten Americans of the Vietnam War

By Louis R. Stockstill

On the following pages you will find one of the most important articles ever published in this magazine. Telling you this may seem redundant. If an article is unimportant, we should not be publishing it at all. At the same time, we have always acknowledged to ourselves that not all readers are interested in everything we print. Our job is to supply a balanced buffet table—not intravenous feeding.

But the matter of our American servicemen who have sacrificed their freedom, their health, and the peace of mind of themselves and their families in behalf of freedom for others—this is a matter that concerns us all. By the hundreds, these men languish in North Vietnam prisons and in Viet Cong jungle camps—unprotected by the Geneva Conventions which are supposed to guard the rights and persons of all prisoners of war. That the bulk of these American prisoners are airmen brings their plight a little closer to us, perhaps. That others have lost life and limb in the same cause is even more saddening. But death and wounds are irretrievable, and all we can do is to make suitable provision for the wounded and the survivors of the dead. The prisoners, on the other hand, are alive and are retrievable. We can do something about them. We must.

The author, who has done such a thorough and painstaking job, served for many years on the staff of The Journal of the Armed Forces, *ultimately as its Editor. Lou Stockstill has devoted his professional life to the examination and explanation of the problems of the armed forces of the United States. He is now a free-lance writer in Washington. This article represents, in our judgment, the finest effort of his distinguished career. It explains the POW problem better, and in more detail, than anything published to date. It includes some concrete suggestions as to what you can do to help.*

Read it, and let your conscience be your guide.

—THE EDITORS

ONCE a month, from her living room high up in an Arlington, Va., apartment building, removed from most brutalities of life except her own thoughts, Gloria Netherland walks a long hallway to the mail chute and deposits a letter.

She watches it drop from sight on the first leg of a journey into an unknown void halfway around the world. The letter begins "Dear Dutch." But whether Dutch will read it, or someone else will read it, or whether it will go unopened is impossible to say.

Gloria and Dutch have been married eighteen years, but she doesn't know—hasn't known for a long time now—if he is alive or dead. And if alive, she doesn't know where he is or how he is.

For more than two years she has written the monthly letters—limited to six lines each, according to current Communist rules. None are answered; none are returned.

But, in the pattern of "dreadful uncertainty" that characterizes her daily life, she never fails to write.

"I realize," she says, "that there is just a fifty-fifty chance he is alive, but I feel that I cannot afford to let anything go undone."

Capt. Roger M. Netherland, USN, who was shot down over North Vietnam in May 1967, is one of the senior US pilots missing in the Vietnam War. Flyers reconnoitering the site where his burning plane plunged to the ground believe they heard his voice. But no word has come through since.

"When you are married to a flyer," Gloria Netherland says, "you learn to live with potential disaster.

A Special Report

AIR FORCE
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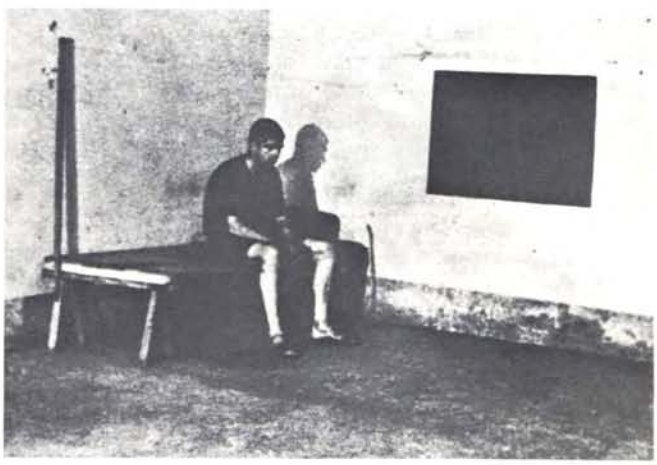
Suffering

Degradation



Isolation

But you expect it to be black and white, not like this. I can't think of him as being gone, but it is very difficult for me to think of him as a prisoner."

She says, "The worst day for me was not the day they came to tell me he had been shot down. The worst day was the day his clothes and books and personal things came back. To have to unpack a man's life is not an easy experience.

"And if he is gone, I will have to do it all again. There will be another complete healing period to go through."

Gloria Netherland is but one of hundreds of wives and parents who live on an emotional roller coaster of grief, hope, faith, anxiety, and raw courage. For some, the waiting has lasted more than five years.

Their husbands and sons are the forgotten men of the Vietnam War—approximately 1,400 men captured by the enemy or missing and possibly in enemy hands. Most of the known captives are imprisoned in North Vietnam, others by the Viet Cong in the jungles of the South. A few are interned in Laos and Red China. Files of 981 men have been stamped with the heart-wrenching legend "MIA"—missing in action.

Some 3,000 "next of kin"—wives, children, and parents—in every state now endure what one calls "this limbo of anguish."

The other side has revealed tragically little about these "casualties" of the war. North Vietnam and the Viet Cong, defying international agreements and basic codes of humanitarianism and decency, have consistently refused to discuss the whereabouts of the

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missing men. Similarly, they have dribbled out only limited and distorted information about selected prisoners in infrequent propaganda movies tailored to their own purposes, often peddling doctored film to foreign outlets. Many wives quite rightly believe that "our husbands are being sold for so much propaganda."

On the shoddy pretext that US captives are not prisoners of war but "criminals," North Vietnam will not allow neutral inspections of its prisons. Yet such inspections are required under the Geneva Conventions, signed by North Vietnam in 1957 and by 119 other governments.

Using the "criminal" charge to mask its defiance, Hanoi not only has rejected inspection of its camps, but has refused to:

- Identify the prisoners it holds;
- Release the sick and wounded;
- Allow proper flow of letters and packages; or
- Protect US prisoners from public abuse.

The Viet Cong and Communist forces in Laos have followed Hanoi's lead by imposing an even more rigid blackout.

The curtain of secrecy the enemy has thrown around the prisoners and missing men has, until recently, been duplicated to some extent by the US government. But this is now changing. A brighter spotlight has been turned on the problem. The change has been wrought by the Nixon Administration. The United States government has now opened up some of its previously closed files of information on the imprisoned and missing men. New initiatives and a tougher approach are the order of the day. Further steps may be in prospect.

New Hope for POWs

For the first time, Administration officials are waging an open fight for the prisoners. The diplomatic maneuverings which shielded many aspects of the problem from public view during the Johnson Administration—although perhaps rightly so for that time—have now been partially cast aside. The United States is speaking out.

Two of President Nixon's top Cabinet officers have embarked on a strong public offensive in which they stress concern for, as well as facts and figures about, the treatment of the US prisoners and missing men.

"I don't understand how the North Vietnamese can be so lacking in humanity that they won't even give us the names of the prisoners they have," declares Secretary of State William P. Rogers. "All they have done is to be more intransigent, more unreasonable, and more inhumane."

Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird says there is "clear evidence that US prisoners are not being treated humanely," and that conditions in the prison camps are "shocking."

Yet, in order for the tough and forthright new policies to produce desired results, citizens must join the attack. Their assistance could be crucial. Many citizens may never have asked themselves how, or if, they can help. Many still may not be aware of the full story of our forgotten men.

One of the high-ranking USAF prisoners is Col. Robinson Risner, Oklahoma City, Okla. Colonel Risner, then a captain, became a jet ace during the Korean War, with eight victories over MIG-15s to his credit.

Here then are the sobering facts about the prisoners and the missing, the details of the obscure existence they live, the way they are used and abused by Hanoi. And here, too, is an account of what the US is doing to aid the men and their families, and suggestions as to how you might lend a hand:

Of the known prisoners—the 401 the armed forces have been able to positively identify as captured—192 are Air Force, 140 are Navy, forty-six are Army men, and twenty-three are Marine Corps personnel.

Nearly 1,000 others are missing in action and thought to be captives. The largest number missing from any single service is 516 from the Air Force. More than 260 are missing in the Army, more than 100 in the Navy, and ninety-four in the Marine Corps.

The prisoners and missing men range in rank from private to colonel, or Navy captain. They include such men as Col. Robinson Risner, of Oklahoma City, one

Navy Lt. Cmdr. John S. McCain, III, son of Adm. J. S. McCain, Jr., top US commander in the Pacific, is believed to have been in solitary confinement since April of last year.

of the top AF pilots, and Navy Lt. Cmdr. J. S. McCain, III, son of the US Commander in Chief, Pacific, Adm. J. S. McCain, Jr.

Several of the known prisoners have now been behind bars more than five years. More than 200 have been imprisoned or missing for more than three and one-half years, more than 500 for over two years.

Some military intelligence the United States has gleaned about these men must be kept secret or couched in guarded language to protect the prisoners.

Nevertheless, accounts of torture and inhumane treatment have emerged. The widely publicized story of the capture, escape, evasion, and rescue of Navy Lt. (j.g.) Dieter Dengler in 1966 presented stark examples. Captured by the Pathet Lao but eventually turned over to North Vietnamese soldiers, Dengler was spread-eagled by his captors and at night left to the mercy of jungle insects, tied to a tree for harassment target practice, repeatedly beaten with fists and sticks (once into unconsciousness) for refusing to sign a statement condemning the US, and tied behind a water buffalo and dragged through the bush. The once 180-pound flyer weighed ninety-eight pounds following his escape and rescue.

Stories of Maltreatment

Other escaped prisoners have told of similar maltreatment in Pathet Lao and Viet Cong jungle camps.

Most recent evidence about those imprisoned in North Vietnam discloses that many have been tortured by being deprived of sleep, refused food, hung from ceilings, tied with ropes until they developed infected scars, and burned with cigarettes. At least one had his fingernails ripped from his hands. The broken bones of another, set by Communist doctors and still in a cast, were rebroken by guards.

It is difficult to know how typical these examples may be. But, regardless of the continuing secrecy in certain areas, substantial information is available on some prisons and the basic treatment of some prisoners. Portions of the record are cloaked in "it is believed" language, some is official hard fact, and some has come from those foreign news sources Hanoi has permitted to peek into selected prison keyholes.

Prisoner treatment, of course, varies, and often the enemy attempts to camouflage the worst conditions. With that in mind, consider these details about three types of prisons—a jungle camp operated by the Communist Pathet Lao; a Viet Cong jungle camp; and a North Vietnamese institution known euphemistically as the "Hanoi Hilton."

The Pathet Lao camp is a bamboo stockade of primitive thatched huts. Prisoners are fed twice a day, mostly rice but with occasional supplemental foodstuffs. Many suffer from malnutrition. Some are afflicted with intestinal parasites. Except when allowed outside to empty toilet pails, prisoners are confined inside the huts, often locked in crude wooden foot blocks or handcuffs. Barbaric treatment, including beatings, is not unique. Prisoners are forced to listen to Radio Hanoi.

The Viet Cong prison or jungle camp houses fewer than a dozen men. The prisoners are fed three times a day, again mostly rice, supplemented by some meat, fish, or vegetables. They are supplied with soap and toothpaste, fifth-rate medical treatment, pills thought to be antimalarial, and even occasional vitamin injections for those in most obvious need. Between meals, prisoners are allowed to smoke, exercise, or just sit. About once a month, they are furnished news of the outside world. They have been told, for example, of the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, of the release of the *Pueblo* crew and the election of President Nixon. They are allowed to write occasional letters, but have no way of knowing the effort is futile. No letters have ever arrived in the US from prisoners held by the VC. To maintain the pretense of a mail-exchange, however, at least one prisoner in this camp was permitted to receive two letters over a ten-month period.

Daily Routine in Hanoi

In the North Vietnam prison camp (in central Hanoi), daily routine is more formalized. Prisoners are awakened between 5:00 and 6:00 in the morning by a gong, followed by a thirty-minute Radio Hanoi (English language) broadcast piped into their cells. At mid-morning they are taken out to empty toilet buckets. About 11:00 a.m., seventeen to nineteen hours after they last ate, they are fed the first of two daily meals. Food consists mainly of pumpkin or squash, pork fat, a vegetable resembling wild onion tops, and bread or rice.

One former prisoner said, "The main diet is based around bread, and during the summer we got a squash soup and pig fat." Prisoners receive three daily cigarettes and sometimes, possibly for propaganda purposes, have been given sweets. (Propaganda films staged by Hanoi have shown tables laden with food, including mounds of fresh pineapple and bananas. But no one was eating.) After the morning meal—picked up on a wooden tray and eaten in their individual cells—prisoners are allowed to "nap" on their bare-board bunks until 2:00 in the afternoon, when their cells are flooded with another half-hour Radio Hanoi broadcast. Between 4:00 and 6:00 p.m., they are fed the second and final meal of the day. The day ends around 9:00 p.m.

Each prisoner is provided with two sets of pajama-like clothing, two blankets, and toilet articles. Each is allowed to shave twice a week and wash his clothing once a week.

Constant Indoctrination

Brainwashing efforts do not follow the hard-line techniques employed during the Korean conflict, but prisoners are subjected to constant lower-key indoctrination. Not only does Radio Hanoi bombard their cells with slanted news and propaganda a full hour out of each day, but prisoners also are furnished with Communist propaganda periodicals and are lectured on the "history" of Vietnam and the provisions of the 1954 Geneva Accords as conveniently interpreted by their captors. Sometimes men reportedly are taken

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from the prison to visit state institutions where they can "learn" more about North Vietnam's "culture."

Attempts also are made to induce them to write or record statements expressing sympathy with the North Vietnamese cause and condemning US involvement in the war.

Within the confines of the prison, the captives generally are isolated from contact or communication with more than one or two other prisoners who may share the same cell. Many men are kept in solitary confinement. As they are moved around in the prison to pick up food, empty toilet buckets, wash, etc., they are carefully shepherded so that one prisoner or group of prisoners seldom encounters another.

At infrequent intervals, certain prisoners have been allowed to write to their families, although few letters ever reach home.

That the prisoners are allowed to write at all, and that they are accorded other elemental amenities, may likely be because the so-called "Hanoi Hilton" is anything but typical.

Propaganda Showplace

US officials, with reasonable suspicion, regard the "Hanoi Hilton" as a propaganda showplace. While foreign newsmen have "seen" prisoners, who have been transported to a central location for that express purpose from at least eight other camps, the "Hilton" is the lone place outsiders have been allowed to enter. And it is the only prison from which US prisoners have ever been released. Obviously, the open-door policy at only one prison creates real doubt that the North Vietnamese can afford to let the world, and in particular the neutral nations, see the conditions that prevail elsewhere.

No prisoner has ever escaped from the prisons of North Vietnam. Those who have managed to struggle back to freedom from the VC jungle camps add up to fewer than two dozen (the specific number is classified). And the Communists have been extremely callous when it comes to returning American prisoners. To date only a handful has been set free. Sixteen have been released by the Viet Cong, nine by Hanoi.

Procedures followed by Hanoi in releasing prisoners are particularly meaningful since North Vietnam has been the bellwether in establishing what might be regarded as over-all policy guidance in the treatment of prisoners elsewhere. And it is in North Vietnam that the greatest number of men are believed to be imprisoned. Of the more than 1,400 captured and missing, nearly 800 (mostly pilots) were downed over North Vietnam. The Defense Department believes "a substantial percentage of the missing" may be prisoners.

POW Releases Follow Pattern

All the prisoner releases by Hanoi—two last year and one this August—have followed a similarly disturbing pattern. First, they have been but token gestures, letting just three men out at a time. Second, they have been accompanied by blatant propaganda announcements in the guise of either "humanitarianism" or "good will," or coupled with some "special" day. Third, the names of the men to be freed are withheld for periods of more than a month, thus creating untold agony for thousands of hopeful next of kin. Fourth, releases are carried out through dissident US intermediaries instead of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the traditional go-between in matters affecting war prisoners.

POWs released in February '68: Overly, Black, Matheny.

As a condition of each of the three prisoner releases, Hanoi has insisted that US pacifist groups be sent to North Vietnam to take custody of the prisoners and accompany them out of the country.

After a protracted wait, the identities of the prisoners are presented to the world in a staged ceremony. Finally, they are allowed to depart for home with their pacifist countrymen, who are merely used by Hanoi in a grossly overt effort to foment further unrest among American citizens and abet militant critics abroad.

The first two prisoner releases took place last year. Three men were released in February, three more in July. All six were "short termers"—that is, men who had been held prisoner for relatively brief periods of time.

The February 1968 group consisted of two Air Force officers, Lt. Col. Norris M. Overly and Capt. John D. Black, and twenty-three-year-old Navy Lt. (j.g.) David P. Matheny. None had been in captivity as much as six months. Lieutenant Matheny had been captured only four months earlier.

The three prisoners released in July 1968 were all Air Force officers: Maj. James F. Low and Capt. Joseph V. Carpenter, imprisoned for seven and six months, respectively, and Maj. Fred N. Thompson, captured less than four months before.

The man designated by Hanoi as the principal go-between for the releases is a fifty-four-year-old pacifist

USAF men released, July '68: Low, Carpenter, Thompson.

named David Dellinger. Chairman of an organization known as the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, he has traveled frequently to Communist bloc nations and to North Vietnam. Currently, he is under indictment on charges of conspiring to incite a riot in Chicago during last year's Democratic Convention.

As the main contact in the prisoner releases, Dellinger, in turn, has named other US pacifists to act as "escorts" in bringing the prisoners out of Hanoi.

Three Released in August

The most recent release—three men, again—came in August of this year and illustrates how completely Hanoi milks the prisoner situation for its own purposes. However, it marked a minor breakthrough of sorts. For the first time, North Vietnam released prisoners who had been held captive for fifteen to twenty-eight months.

The new policies of the Nixon Administration may have had something to do with the release of the longer-term prisoners. Publicity about two of the men had been widely aired by DoD several months earlier.

Like the two preceding releases, the third also was carried out under the banner of David Dellinger. On this occasion, he designated a somewhat ragtag escort group. The group was substantially larger than any previously dispatched. There were four escorts. They took along three cameramen.

Leader and spokesman was Rennard C. Davis, twenty-nine, National Coordinator of Dellinger's National Mobilization Committee. A member of Students for a Democratic Society, Davis is also under indictment on charges growing out of the Chicago riots. He had to obtain a court ruling in order to leave the country.

With Davis in the escort group were Linda Sue Evans, twenty-two, an SDS regional organizer; Grace Paley, forty-six, a member of antiwar and antidraft organizations; and James Johnson, twenty-three, Negro, former GI who served a stockade term for refusing to fight in Vietnam. The three cameramen, from an underground movie-making outfit, were identified as Robert Kramer, thirty-six, an SDS member during a stint at Columbia University; Norman Fruchter, thirty-two; and John B. Douglas, thirty-one.

Team Flew to Hanoi

The seven-member team flew to Hanoi in mid-July, about two weeks after North Vietnam announced plans to release the prisoners. For the next couple of weeks they received Hanoi's "grand tour," were escorted on a 500-mile trip into the DMZ, met with the Prime Minister, and were ultimately entertained at a farewell party well-oiled with rice liquor and propaganda.

At the farewell ceremony, according to details churned out by the North Vietnam News Agency (VNA), the prisoners were "handed over . . . to the American antiwar delegation" with a Madame Bui Thi Cam denouncing the "monstrous crimes" perpetrated by the "US imperialists" who had destroyed towns and crops and "massacred . . . women, children, and old folk."

She said US pilots "caught in the act of committing grave crimes" are not entitled to the protection of the Geneva Conventions, but are, nevertheless, treated "in accordance with the humanitarian policy of the government."

James Johnson, accepting the prisoners "on behalf of the American antiwar delegation," said, "We know, as these pilots must know, that all over the world the United States has been branded an outlaw nation." His statement, running some 500 words, might almost have been written by Hanoi.

The North Vietnam News Agency said, "The three released American military men then took turns in expressing, each in his own [way], their deep gratitude to the Vietnamese People, the DRVN government, and the Vietnam People's Army, for this humanitarian act as well as for the humane treatment all of them had received throughout the period of their detention."

The names of the prisoners were revealed. Two were Navy men: Lt. Robert F. Frishman, captured twenty-one months earlier, and Seaman Douglas B. Hegdahl, imprisoned for two years and four months. The third was Air Force Capt. Wesley L. Rumble, held for fifteen months.

One of the men released last August is Navy Lt. Robert F. Frishman, a POW since his F-4 Phantom was downed over Hanoi in October 1967. He is shown here while still a prisoner.

Released at the same time as Lieutenant Frishman was Seaman Douglas Hegdahl, a POW for two years and four months. This propaganda photo was made while he was still in captivity.

The prisoners and their escorts left Hanoi on August 5. Arriving in Vientiane, Laos, that night, they were seen for the first time by US newsmen. They were

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described as "pale and gaunt," clad in "dungarees and sandals."

The press accounts noted that Frishman, acting as spokesman for the prisoners, selected his words "carefully." He said only that he was happy "to be returning home, to be back with my country and my wife."

There then followed a question-and-answer session. Here are revealing excerpts from Frishman's interrogation by the newsmen:

Q How was the treatment you received . . .?

A I received adequate food, clothing, and housing.

Q Would you describe it as humane treatment?

A Sir, I believe I have answered that question.

Q Did they make any attempt to indoctrinate you or brainwash you in any way?

A I have no comment.

Q Was their treatment better at all when they decided you were going to be released?

A As I say, my treatment has been adequate.

Q Are you concerned that other prisoners might be harmed by something you might say here?

A Yes. I in no way want to jeopardize any of the other people who have been . . .

The sentence trailed off.

When the prisoners arrived in Bangkok the following day, Frishman was quoted as saying, "It's great to be back." Nothing more. At some point during the return journey, Frishman had indicated the desire of all three men to be furnished with military clothing. "We left in uniform," he said. "We intend to return in uniform." The clothing was rushed to Frankfurt, last stop before New York.

Arrival in New York

When the three men arrived at Kennedy International Airport in New York, I was there to see them for myself. To television audiences, the returning prisoners may have looked reasonably well cared for. But their appearance on the hot, noisy flight line was deeply saddening.

When the general passengers and the pacifist escorts had disembarked, the families of the prisoners were allowed to board the plane for a brief reunion away from the eyes of the curious. Twenty minutes later, the men and their families began emerging.

There was no brass band, no flags, no clamoring throng to welcome them. Only a cluster of newsmen, cameras, government representatives, police, and a small crowd of onlookers.

Lieutenant Frishman, followed closely by Seaman Hegdahl, was first off the plane. Both wore their new uniforms, the Navy blue contrasting starkly with their drawn, pallid faces. Captain Rumble, ill, stooped, pale, was assisted down the steps, helped into a police car, and rushed to a waiting medical-evacuation plane.

The two Navy men and their families were led to a small platform, barren but for a gaggle of intertwined microphones. Uncertainly at first, and then with alert precision they returned the salute of Air Force Col. Milt Kegley standing nearby.

They were ashen in color. Their eyes were deep, hollow circles of darker gray, much like the exaggerated eyes of starving children. They smiled, but somehow their smiles seemed macabre; not forced, but not exactly real; joyful surely, but with an underlying tautness; perhaps nearer to tears than laughter.

Lieutenant Frishman once again spoke for all three men, repeating what by now had become his stock statement. They were happy to be home, they had received "adequate food, clothing, and housing" from their captors.

He, himself, had been "seriously wounded." The North Vietnamese doctors had removed his elbow and tied the muscles together. "I am glad to still have my arm," he said.

The Arm Was Wasted

It hung at his side, the loose sleeve of his jacket emphasizing that the arm was wasted, thin, far shorter than the other. When the suggestion had been made to him earlier that, "They'll fix it better at home," he replied, "Oh, no. They won't. It's impossible now."

Now, as he extolled the "adequate" treatment he and the others had received, and praised the North Vietnamese for saving his arm, Frishman voiced the "hope that there will be some more releases."

At his side, Douglas Hegdahl, once a robust heavyweight, continued to smile, his face almost skeletal. A reporter asked how much weight he had lost. He had "no comment."

But then Frishman addressed the microphones. "I lost forty-five pounds; Seaman Hegdahl lost sixty pounds," he said. It was the first detailed confirmation of their deprivations.

A newsman asked Frishman why the North Vietnamese had selected him for release in preference to some other prisoner.

"I am sure they released me for some reason . . . this reason I do not know," he said.

What about the welfare of other prisoners still held by Hanoi?

"No comment," Lieutenant Frishman said.

Press Session Quickly Ended

The session with the press was over quickly, the final questions muffled in the roar of a nearby jet. The men were tired; they had been traveling for thirty-six hours.

"I want to be with my wife now," Lieutenant Frishman said. He placed his good arm around her. The prisoners and their families moved off the platform.

As Frishman turned, I saw him for the first time from the side. His shoulders were incredibly thin. The collar of his shirt hung loosely about his neck. The lines of his nose, his cheeks, and his chin were sharply drawn, haggard. So were Hegdahl's.

If the two men had been well-treated, there was nothing in their appearance to verify it. The almost corpse-like pallor of their skin, tightly stretched, almost translucent, mutely testified to long seclusion from the sunlight.

The men and their families moved to waiting transportation for the short trip to the medical-evacuation plane and the final leg of their journey to military

hospitals. I turned with the other newsmen to walk back into the International Arrivals building for the meeting with the pacifist escorts.

We waited for an hour in a small, stuffy room intensely illuminated by bright klieg lights.

Finally, the pacifists straggled in, having been delayed in customs. The four escorts and the three cameramen gathered on a platform at one end of the room. By any standards, they were unprepossessing in appearance.

The leader and spokesman, Rennie Davis, was the most presentable, dressed in neat trousers and shirt, hair slightly long but combed and parted.

Peering from time to time at notes clutched in his right hand, Davis began a recitation of what the seven-member team had seen and done in North Vietnam. His monologue had little to do with the prisoners. It mainly emphasized the "devastation" that US bombing forays had inflicted on a "determined" and "unbeatable" people now instilled with a "mood of victory." The North Vietnamese believe, he said, that they have President Nixon "trapped."

He introduced Grace Paley, a short frumpy woman in a cotton dress. She said North Vietnam considers US prisoners criminals, but releases them to "show good faith" and as a demonstration of their "humanitarian" treatment.

Praise of Hanoi's Treatment

Next up was Linda Sue Evans, young, blonde, wearing tightly fitting, flared blue jeans. "We believe," she said, "that North Vietnam should win." She praised Hanoi's "humane" treatment of the prisoners.

The young Negro, Johnson, principal pacifist speaker at the Hanoi ceremony, was next. He said with obvious pleasure that the North Vietnamese "feel they have defeated the United States."

Davis opened the press conference to questions.

"Are our prisoners being mistreated?" he was asked.

He had seen no such evidence. The group had met a "total of twenty-five to thirty all told," and had been informed by the prisoners that they had been protected within the very villages they had bombed, been given immediate medical attention, and "better" food than is provided for their guards.

He said continuing concern is voiced about the treatment of US prisoners, but he is more concerned about the treatment of prisoners from the other side held in camps in South Vietnam.

Davis was asked to comment on a statement by Secretary of Defense Laird that Hanoi's treatment of prisoners is in "flagrant violation" of the Geneva Conventions.

Davis said he thinks North Vietnam "legally regards the United States as an outlaw nation." (An interesting comment. James Johnson had used the same "outlaw" phrase in his Hanoi remarks, but attributed it to the pacifists themselves.)

"You say our prisoners are being treated humanely," I asked Davis. "How many prison camps did you visit?"

Repeatedly, he sought to evade a direct answer, but I kept hammering "how many prisons" at him.

Two of the men released by Hanoi in August, Seaman Hegdahl, left, and Lieutenant Frishman, here hold a news conference early in September at Bethesda Naval Hospital.

Finally he admitted he had "no information at all" about any of the prison camps.

The press conference produced nothing of any kind about the status of US prisoners held by North Vietnam. The pacifists had returned believing what they wanted to believe. They brought back no list of prisoners held by Hanoi, no hint that North Vietnam might consider changing its policy on prisoners.

Except for some fifty letters Hanoi had permitted them to carry home, they had returned only with an array of sugar-coated propaganda. They had swallowed whole as much as possible and stuffed the rest into their luggage.

The press conference could only raise serious doubts about the value of continuing to allow Hanoi the luxury of using such groups to bring back tiny numbers of prisoners. Some Administration officials, even some wives and families of prisoners and missing men, also are beginning to question the validity of this practice.

At the current exchange rate, it would take well over 400 years to get all of the men home. And the current release procedures, in the words of the Washington, D. C., *Evening Star*, are "a little like Oriental water torture—and just as humanitarian."

Twenty-five days after Frishman, Hegdahl, and Rumble reached New York, I went to Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland to hear the two Navy men tell about their prison life. Sunshine had improved their color; they had regained some weight. They were ready to open up.

Frishman recounted how he had been blindfolded after his capture and, despite serious injuries, driven in a truck to other locations where he was removed from the truck and stoned by the populace. When he reached the prison, he was refused medical treatment and told he "was going to die in four hours" unless he talked. He "finally passed out" and was taken to a hospital. "Then, even with my bad arm, they tied me up with ropes."

Doctors operated on his arm but failed to remove missile fragments. It was six months before the in-

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Seaman Hegdahl was photographed for propaganda purposes during his imprisonment in North Vietnam, "reading" a US magazine he was allowed to hold "just long enough for them to take the picture." Hegdahl spent more than a year in solitary, seven months in one stretch.

cision healed over. "I would wake up and find my arm stuck to the blankets . . . the scab would come off . . . the wound would drain again." One of his legs was left with "a seeping sore," still draining when he reached the US almost two years later.

During much of his ordeal, Frishman was isolated in a tin-roofed cell, vented by "a few holes." In forty-five-degree winter weather, he froze. In summer, it was "like an oven." Sometimes, he was forced to sit on a stool in the stifling room—"just sit . . . and sit"—until he passed out.

Early this year when interviewed by *L'Europeo*, his captors wrote out what he was to say and then "practiced" it with him.

Did they try to "fatten" him in his final weeks of imprisonment, I asked?

"Yes, they did." On July 4 they took him before the camp commander who "had a real nice table with some fruit on it. . . . I knew then that I was going home."

Solitary Confinement

Hegdahl, too, had been subjected to solitary confinement—in all, for more than a year. The longest stretch lasted "seven months and ten days."

He was permitted occasional mail, but the letters were rifled of enclosures (including money) sent by his parents. The lone package he was allowed also was plundered before it was handed to him.

For propaganda purposes, he was photographed "reading" a US magazine which he was allowed to hold "just long enough for them to take the picture."

Frishman said he was threatened before his release. If he embarrassed North Vietnam, they would "have ways of getting even with me," he was told. He was cautioned "not to forget that they still have hundreds of my buddies."

But those still imprisoned want the facts out in the open, he said. One told him "not to worry about telling the truth," that if it means more torture, "at least he'll know why he's getting it and he will feel that it will be worth the sacrifice."

While North Vietnam's claims of "humane" treatment of the prisoners have failed to stand up to public scrutiny, it is equally apparent that Hanoi's policies and those of the Viet Cong have been cruelly lacking in compassion for the families of the prisoners and missing men.

Take Andrea Rander, whose husband, Army SSgt. Donald Rander, is held by the Viet Cong. He was first reported missing during the January Tet offensive last year. Four weeks later she was officially notified that he had been wounded and imprisoned. She has been waiting almost two years for a letter that has never come. She has great difficulty, she told me, in making decisions. "I keep putting everything off. I keep telling myself I will wait until Donald comes home. It's my way, I guess, of convincing myself that he will be back."

Sporadic Letters

Billie Hiteshew, wife of AF Maj. James Hiteshew, who was captured by North Vietnam in March of 1967, has lived with the problem longer, but at least she has heard from her husband. She receives sporadic letters, including two this year. And she has seen photographs of her husband. Shortly after his capture, CBS purchased a film of Hiteshew—confined in a hospital with a broken leg and arm—being interviewed by Felix Greene, a British antiwar journalist. She watched her husband say he agreed with Senators who feel "we need to take another look at our foreign policy," a view she had never heard him express or even hint at before.

Evelyn Grubb's only knowledge of her husband came from a similar Hanoi propaganda gesture. An unarmed reconnaissance aircraft, piloted by AF Maj. Wilmer "Newk" Grubb, was shot down in January 1966 while a Christmas bombing halt was in effect. Hanoi gloatingly publicized his capture, conveniently obscuring the true nature of his mission. The day Mrs. Grubb heard of his capture, it was snowing, two of her three sons were ill, and she was three months pregnant. Each time she writes she tells him about their sons (there are now four; one he has never seen), and sends photographs of all of them stapled

At left, Mrs. Wilmer Grubb, whose USAF pilot husband was shot down early in 1966. Major Grubb has never seen his youngest son. Shown here with their mother are Jeffrey, Roland, Stephen, and Roy Grubb.

to the letter so he will know if they have been removed. She doesn't know whether he has received a single photograph or letter. In four years, she has had no further official word of her husband.

Elizabeth Hill is another wife I talked with. Only twenty-three, she was married to AF Capt. Howard J. Hill (both are AF "brats") in August 1967. Two weeks later he returned to Southeast Asia, and just before Christmas was shot down. Nine months passed before she learned that his capture had been confirmed. As she told me this, she smiled. "I can't help smiling," she apologized. "After Howard was missing for so long, I just have to smile when I say he is a prisoner." She has written faithfully for almost two years, but there has never been an answer.

Although regular exchange of mail between prisoners and their families is guaranteed under the Geneva Conventions (even when two countries are not formally at war), the Communists have permitted only a trickle of letters to flow out of North Vietnam.

Efforts of the American Red Cross and the International Red Cross to improve the situation have been essentially futile in the face of Hanoi's obstinance.

No Inspections Permitted

Not only has North Vietnam rejected Red Cross efforts to establish improved flow of mail and packages to and from US prisoners, and to permit inspections of their prison camps, but they persistently have refused to even acknowledge the existence of, or accept mail from, their own men held as prisoners in South Vietnam. The latter camps are regularly inspected by the neutral International Committee of the Red Cross, and names of all captured North Vietnamese and Viet Cong soldiers are prepared for Hanoi and the VC, but are spurned.

Although the Red Cross has tackled the problem again and again through all potential channels (even seeking help from the USSR)—and keeps on trying "all the time," according to ARC Vice President Robert Lewis—most of the effort has fallen on deaf ears.

Mr. Lewis says the Red Cross also has made it clear that it is prepared to send representatives to Hanoi at any time to accept released prisoners, but the North Vietnamese prefer to stick to their practice of using dissident go-betweens.

Mail for Prisoners

Mail for all prisoners and missing men is sent through a variety of channels and addresses. Some is handled by the Red Cross, some is mailed direct to foreign post offices, but little is known to have reached the men to whom it is addressed.

Letters written by the prisoners themselves have fared somewhat better because of their propaganda value. But none ever has arrived in the States from prisoners held by the Viet Cong. And fewer than 100 men held by North Vietnam have been allowed to write over the past five years. The average for this small group has been less than two letters a year.

Currently the letters from prisoners are written on a prescribed form, about five by seven inches, which makes its own envelope when folded. Six lines are provided for the message. Instructions tell the prisoners to write "legibly and only on the lines" and "only about health and family." The form states that "Letters from families should also conform to this pro forma."

Not all wives and parents abide by the advice, but many, like Gloria Netherland, do. Forms are provided by the armed forces. All carry a mailing address in the Vietnamese language reading: "Camp of detention for US pilots captured in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam."

But for most families, whether they use the six-line form letter or a longer page, the return on their investment is slim at best.

For families of men listed as "missing," even the lack of mail might be bearable if Hanoi and the VC would release the names of all prisoners. But they have consistently refused. Some US Senators say Hanoi "could devise no subtler cruelty."

While no solution to either the mail problem or the list of missing is in sight, the US armed forces, meanwhile, do what they can to ease the plight of the next of kin.

It is not a simple job, nor has it always received top marks in every area, but as the list of prisoners and missing has grown and as the services have learned from past mistakes and found out more about what the families want and need, they have moved increasingly into programs that now garner well-deserved praise.

All of the wives I talked with feel that their husband's service, as one put it, "is doing everything humanly possible."

Notifying Next of Kin

In the early days when a man was captured or turned up missing, next of kin sometimes were advised by telegram. This impersonal approach proved highly unsatisfactory and has long since been abandoned.

Today when catastrophe strikes, a service representative is sent to the home to call on the family, break the news in person, give whatever details are immediately available, and offer such solace and assistance as he can provide.

Either this representative or another is thereafter permanently assigned as an "assistance officer" for all future contacts. He makes sure the families are informed of breaking developments, if any; answers their questions, or refers the queries to someone who can; and ensures that they receive such legal, financial, or other aid as they may require.

The main Air Force effort is performed from the personnel center at Randolph AFB, Tex. Service is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and next of kin may make collect telephone calls any time, day or night.

Families are told everything the services can tell them about the circumstances surrounding the capture or disappearance of the man. Any subsequent news is passed along as quickly as it is received.

(Continued on following page)

On a broader front, all services have put together special informational programs for the next-of-kin to keep them informed about over-all prisoner developments. These most often take the form of newsletters. But the Army's Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Kenneth G. Wickham, writes a personal, individually prepared letter to each Army family once a month.

The letters and newsletters are supplemented by personal meetings with individual family members or with groups. This practice was instituted early by the Navy, but has now been made uniform for all services, under expanded policies of the Nixon Administration.

Beginning this past spring, group meetings were instituted under the aegis of a joint Defense/State/military team, with families from several services attending at a central location for each given area. At the meetings, the next of kin receive a full briefing on the prisoner problem.

Much of what they can be told is not new, but it has demonstrated to the satisfaction of many, if not all, of those attending that the government is giving the prisoner problem priority consideration, and sincerely wants, and is trying, to help in every way possible.

Meetings with Next of Kin

The meetings have been spread all across the country. Scheduled mostly at Air Force bases, they are generally held in Service or Officers Clubs, in an informal atmosphere, with local volunteer-wives serving coffee or punch to the families—normally about 100 wives and parents.

One meeting held at Bolling Air Force Base near Washington, D. C., was attended by Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge (home to report to the President). He told the group what was happening at the Paris peace table. Another briefing session was conducted at the Pentagon itself. Defense Secretary Laird met and talked with the families.

One member of the briefing team, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard G. Capen, Jr., said, "We are always frank about telling the families there have been no great breakthroughs. I review the over-all situation; Frank Sieverts [State Department representative] discusses the Paris talks and other State Department efforts conducted through diplomatic channels. Then we spend the remainder of the time, about an hour or an hour and a half, responding to questions."

Mr. Capen says reaction to the briefings has been excellent. Sometimes "wild suggestions" are offered or family members give vent to angry frustration. ("Some cannot understand why we learn so little about the men.") But the meetings, Capen feels, have been extremely useful and have helped to partially satisfy the yearning of many families for some closer contact with their government in Washington.

He has been through many heartrending conversations, but what remains most vividly in his mind is the meeting at which one wife stood up and declared, "I want my husband back, but I don't want to give my country away to do it."

Most of the families, he says, "have real understanding and appreciation of the problems. We want to assure them that when the men do come back, we will be in a position to say we did all we could." He thinks most of the families now feel, if they didn't before, that this is the case.

In addition to the programs designed for the next of kin, the armed forces also carry out certain procedures for the prisoners and missing men themselves.

All, for example, are considered for promotion at the time they normally would have been considered if not in captured or missing status. Their full pay and allowances are continued indefinitely, and they receive whatever general pay increases are authorized for others on active duty. Allotments the men provided for their families are increased as needs dictate.

New laws also have been enacted, and others are being sought, to protect rights of the men that might otherwise be jeopardized.

The military "savings deposit" program, for example, encouraged overseas servicemen to bank a portion of their pay in high-interest accounts as a means of cutting down on the US gold-drain. But the law contained no provision for men who were captured or reported missing. This inequity was corrected only to have a second develop. The maximum that can accumulate in such accounts is $10,000. Anything above that amount draws no interest. With deposits of some men now approaching or exceeding the ceiling, the Defense Department recently asked Congress for authority to invest "excess" amounts in the purchase of US savings bonds and notes.

Yet, despite these and other continuing efforts on behalf of the men and their families, it is all too apparent that the combined activities of the armed forces, the State and Defense Departments, the American and International Red Cross, and the efforts at the Paris talks have reunited few prisoners with their loved ones. Nor has there been any new hope for proper medical care of the sick and injured, neutral inspection of prison camps, full disclosure of the names of all captives, or proper flow of mail.

The new Nixon Administration initiatives are helpful, but only full and continuing exposure of the plight of the prisoners and their families, together with relentless public pressure at home and abroad, are likely to produce desired action.

An occasional newspaper editorial is not enough. Limited news coverage of developing prisoner stories is not enough. An infrequent letter-to-the-editor is not enough. A statement inserted in the back pages of the *Congressional Record* is not enough. A business-as-usual attitude on the part of the American public can only make apparent to Hanoi that these men who have given so much to their country have indeed been forgotten by those for whom they made the sacrifice.

Some wives of the prisoners and missing men have reached the same conclusions. Some are taking steps to counter public apathy, and to arouse the Congress.

Mrs. James Bond Stockdale of Coronado, Calif., wife of a senior Naval officer held by North Vietnam, has encouraged other wives to send telegrams to the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris, and helped to organize prisoner families. Mrs. James Lindberg

Hughes of Santa Fe, N. M., wife of a captured Air Force lieutenant colonel, and Mrs. Arthur S. Mearns of Los Angeles, wife of a missing Air Force major, also have been urging the Congress and others to act.

Many of the wives are essentially satisfied that the services and the Administration are doing all they can. But some feel, as Evelyn Grubb says, that "there is a bargaining point for everything; we have to find it." The wives are convinced that more public pressure is essential.

Some have been particularly critical of the inaction by Congress. "Usually," Mrs. Stockdale has said, "they put something in the *Congressional Record* and then forget about it."

A check of the *Record* discloses that this practice was, until very recently, more or less standard. But there is hopeful evidence of a growing change—partly as a result of appeals by the wives, partly as a result of the more open discussion policy encouraged by the Administration.

In August, shortly before Congress went into brief summer recess, forty-two Senators banded together in a strong statement condemning North Vietnam for its "cruel" treatment of the prisoners and their families. Instigated by two opponents of our Vietnam policies, Charles Goodell (R-N. Y.) and Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), the declaration says if North Vietnam thinks it can "influence the policy of the United States toward the Vietnam conflict" through its intransigent position on the prisoners, it is "doomed to failure."

"Neither we in Congress, nor the Administration, nor the American people as a whole, nor indeed the families directly affected, will be swayed by this crude attempt."

Those signing the statement included both Democrats and Republicans representing thirty-three of the fifty states. Three names that might have added weight but were absent from the list of signatures were those of war critics J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), George McGovern (D-S. D.), and Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn.).

The Senate statement ended with a specific plea to "the governments, the statesmen, and the ordinary men and women around the world" who spoke out in 1966 against Hanoi's proposed "war-crimes trials"—a plan that was abandoned by North Vietnam after a wave of world protest.

The Senators said those who protested in 1966 should "make their voices heard once more. Then, as now, the issue was not political but humanitarian—and Hanoi responded to the force of world public opinion. If that force can again be mobilized, this too may contribute to inducing from Hanoi greater respect for human decency and for the rule of law." On August 21, the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris vehemently rejected the protest as "slander" and an attempt "to deceive public opinion."

In the House of Representatives, Congressman William L. Dickinson (R-Ala.) sent a letter to his colleagues asking that they join him, after the August recess, in making floor statements protesting the treatment of our war prisoners.

Whether these moves are one-shot efforts remains to be seen. What members of both houses seem to have overlooked is the potential force of a Joint Congressional Resolution condemning Hanoi's prisoner policies.

Whatever action Congress may take, what will count most significantly is the time and effort the American people are willing to expend in helping solve the problem.

In my numerous interviews with government officials, representatives of the Red Cross, members of the armed forces, and next of kin of the prisoners, I asked each person what he or she thought would be the most effective attack that could be launched.

They agreed that a four-pronged letter campaign could produce dramatic results. The letters should be directed to:

- Representatives of foreign nations;
- Newspapers and magazines in foreign nations;
- Members of the US House and Senate; and
- Xuan Thuy, chief North Vietnamese negotiator in Paris.

The letters to the foreign nations and the press in those nations should urge that pressure be brought to bear on Hanoi to live up to the spirit of the Geneva Conventions by putting into practice the Conventions' rules on the treatment of war prisoners.

The letters to Xuan Thuy should demand the same points. And those individuals who are not necessarily in sympathy with the war should make it clear that proper treatment of the prisoners is nevertheless an overriding consideration. All should note that continued intransigence on the part of Hanoi will only stiffen the resolve of the American public, not weaken it.

Letters to members of Congress (addressed to the Representative from your own congressional district and to either or both of your US Senators) should call for a Joint Resolution demanding proper treatment for the prisoners and missing men, and stressing the solidarity of the nation in this aim.

How You Can Help

If you want to help, send a postcard to AIR FORCE/SPACE DIGEST at 1750 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington, D. C. 20006, and you will be mailed a list of Washington, D. C., addresses of ambassadors of foreign nations whose assistance could be crucial, together with a list of selected foreign newspapers and publications.

Letters to Xuan Thuy can be addressed, in simplified form, as follows: Xuan Thuy, North Vietnam Delegation, Paris Peace Talks, Paris, France.

There is a chance—possibly a good chance—that world opinion might force Hanoi to honor basic codes of human decency.

"By any human standards," the position of North Vietnam is "totally inexcusable," Secretary of State William Rogers says. "I don't understand why we have not become more excited about the prisoner question."

The Secretary is telling the people of the United States that their concern is important. The rest is up to you. If you want to help the men many Americans have forgotten, you can. Your letter could be the one that spells the difference.—END