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Congressional Record S. 5952 - Sad Plight of American Prisoners of War in North Vietnam and Laos

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SAD PLIGHT OF AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN NORTH VIETNAM AND LAOS

Mr MANSFIELD. Mr. President, the plight of American prisoners of war in North Vietnam and Laos is one which we cannot close as a missing chapter in the Southeast Asian war. It is my understanding that there are approximately 800 men who are missing or presumed captured in North Vietnam, 500 in South Vietnam, and 200 in Laos. What happens to them is of concern to everyone of us and our feelings about U.S. intervention in Vietnam comes secondary to their eventual release.

North Vietnam signed the Geneva Convention on the protection of prisoners of war in 1957 but since that time it has refused to even give the names of the captured Americans or to even let their loved ones know if they are alive or not. They have, in short, indicated a complete unconcern for the American prisoners they hold and for their own prisoners held in South Vietnam and Laos.

The parents, wives, children, and relatives of these American prisoners have been treated shabbily in their attempts to find if their loved ones were alive. They have been given lectures. They have been told to demonstrate against the war. They have been promised information and then the information was not forthcoming.

As one who looks upon the war in Vietnam as a mistake and a continuing tragedy, I feel concerned about these prisoners because they were only carrying out their obligations under a policy which was formulated here in Washington.

I would hope it would be possible for North Vietnam to disclose the names of all the prisoners of war it holds and that the National Liberation Front and the Pathet Lao would do the same. We would like to have assurances that they are being given proper food, medical care, and would be allowed to correspond with their families. For those who are sick or wounded, we ask that they be repatriated and that North Vietnam honor its legal obligations under the Geneva Convention. I urge the International Red Cross and the International Control Commission to step up its efforts to inspect the prison camps and I urge also that all Americans, in line with the suggestion made by *Look* magazine, express their concern for our men missing and captive in letters to North Vietnam's Premier, Pham Van Dong. They could be sent to: What About the POW's? care of *Look*, P.O. Box 1, Des Moines, Iowa, and from

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there they would be forwarded to Hanoi.

The prisoners' plight is not a matter of politics. It is one of common feeling for our fellow countrymen who have become prisoners of war in carrying out their obligations to their country.

I urge all Americans, regardless of their feelings on the war, to contact *Look* magazine at the above address and to redouble their efforts in behalf of their fellow citizens through correspondence and otherwise to bring about information about these fellow countrymen of ours and also their ultimate release.



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

April 22, 1970

Honorable Michael J. Mansfield
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Senator Mansfield:

I have noted in the Congressional Record of April 20 your comments and concern over the American prisoner of war situation. Your call upon The International Red Cross and The International Control Commission to step up its efforts to inspect the prison camps are very much appreciated. The Look magazine suggestion calling upon all Americans to mail letters expressing their concern for our men missing in action and captured is most commendable.

As a member of the POW Policy Committee, I can assure you that your support in this matter is most helpful to us in the Department of Defense as well as to the hundreds of wives, children and parents of our missing and captured servicemen.

Your continued interest in this most tragic problem is appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard G. Capen, Jr.", written over the typed name.

Richard G. Capen, Jr.
Assistant to the Secretary
for Legislative Affairs