

V.F.W. Chief Says Withdrawal Should Match Prisoner Release

Also Tells Senate Panel That
Press Coverage of War Is
Not 'Hindered by Facts'

WASHINGTON, May 28 (AP) —The head of a war veterans group said yesterday that United States troop withdrawals from Vietnam should be done at a rate matching the release of United States prisoners of war.

Herbert R. Rainwater, commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, also said in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "the image that is being presented to the American people by the media of United States involvement in Indochina has not been hindered by facts."

Asked by the committee chairman, Senator J. W. Fulbright of Arkansas, to comment on news reports alleging what he called "arbitrary and dictatorial" tendencies on the part of the South Vietnamese Government, Mr. Rainwater replied:

"I would say they are highly exaggerated, as are most of the articles of sensationalism coming out of South Vietnam in the press."

On the issue of prisoners of war, Mr. Rainwater said that American prisoners were the enemy's "ace in the hole." The enemy cannot be trusted to release the prisoners if the United States withdraws unilaterally, he said.

In an exchange with Senator Fulbright, an advocate of withdrawing all troops by the end of the year, Mr. Rainwater suggested that the nation take the opposite course and "not withdraw another man."

Saying that his 1.6 million-member group included 400,000 Vietnam veterans, the commander suggested that the House and Senate pass a concurrent resolution calling on President Nixon to stop all troop withdrawals at a fixed date.

He said that withdrawals should not resume until North Vietnam began releasing American prisoners. Each group of prisoner releases would result in new troop withdrawals, Mr. Rainwater said, until no prisoners or troops were left.

Another witness, Representative Paul N. McCloskey Jr. of California, said that briefings given by United States Government officials in South Viet-



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Herbert R. Rainwater

nam and Laos were "deceptive, incomplete, misleading."

"The intention was to conceal information from the people of the United States as if we were the enemy," he said.

In his separate testimony, Mr. Rainwater was critical of those who pointed to single incidents such as the Mylai killings and used them to condemn all United States efforts in Indochina.

He said that the United States had made mistakes in Vietnam but added that, in his opinion, "progress" had been all but ignored.

Mr. Rainwater said that he visited Washington during the encampment earlier this month of antiwar Vietnam veterans. He said he believed that only about 60 per cent of them were old enough to have served in Vietnam.

He referred to the appearance before the Foreign Relations Committee of a former lieutenant, John Kerry, who was praised by many in Congress for what they said was his eloquence in pleading for a speedy end to the war.

"He is an opportunist taking advantage of a very confused minority," the V.F.W. commander declared, saying he had heard that Mr. Kerry intended to seek political office.

Mr. Fulbright referred to Mr. Kerry's record as a wounded and decorated Vietnam veteran and replied:

"You may question his sincerity, but as far as his character and motives, I don't share your characterization at all."