

CHRISTMAS LETTERS FOR P.O.W.'S SOUGHT

WASHINGTON, Nov. 25 (AP) —A nationwide drive in under way to collect 100 tons of mail for a Christmas display of concern for missing and captive United States servicemen in Southeast Asia.

"If you want to offer these men a gift, send a letter showing your concern over their plight," says Mrs. Bobby G. Vinson, coordinator of a national group representing families of more than 1,500 men who are prisoners of war or missing in action.

She said teamsters had agreed to truck the mail at their expense to New York, where longshoremen are to load it for shipment to France. Delivery is to be made in Paris to the North Vietnamese delegation to the peace talks.

Special to The New York Times

AMITYVILLE, L. I., Nov. 25—A group of private pilots will attempt to draw attention to the plight of American prisoners of war in North Vietnam by flying their planes over shopping centers on Long Island the day after Thanksgiving.

The new group, "The Long Island Flyers Association for the Assistance of P.O.W.'s in Vietnam," plans to send 35 planes aloft Friday morning from Zahn's Airport here to drop 1,500 leaflets on five shopping centers: Mid-Island in Hicksville; Smithhaven Mall, Smithtown; Roosevelt Field, Garden City; South Bay, Babylon, and Walt Whitman, Huntington.

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LAIRD CHALLENGED ON DEAD P.O.W.'S

No Evidence of Ill-Treatment, Cora Weiss Asserts

By NEIL SHEEHAN
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 25—The head of an antiwar group accused Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird today of having distorted for political purposes information on American prisoners in North Vietnam that the group has been providing.

Mrs. Cora Weiss, co-chairman of the Committee of Liaison with Families of Servicemen Detained in North Vietnam, voiced objections in an interview to Mr. Laird's implication in Congressional testimony that 17 men reported dead by the North Vietnamese had died from mistreatment in detention.

Mr. Laird said at a news conference on Monday that a key factor in the decision to launch the rescue mission "was new information we received this month that some of our men were dying in the prisoner of war camps."

In his Congressional testimony, Mr. Laird said he believed "that the lives of our American servicemen held captive are in danger every day that Hanoi holds them."

The Government obtained news of the 17 deaths from Mrs. Weiss's New York-based peace committee, which has been chosen by North Vietnam as the channel to communicate information on prisoners to their families.

"Mr. Laird is attempting to justify his acts of war by stating that the men have died in captivity of ill-treatment, which the Vietnamese have never stated, which we have never stated and for which there is no evidence," Mrs. Weiss said.

'Diversionary Tactic' Seen

She contended that the Nixon Administration was trying to use the question of the prisoners "as a diversionary tactic to take America's attention off of the escalated war."

A Defense Department spokesman said Mr. Laird's purpose was to seek humanitarian treatment for prisoners and he charged that North Vietnam refused to observe the Geneva Convention provisions for verification of this treatment by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

At a New York news conference nearly two weeks ago, Mrs. Weiss announced that six men had died. She said she obtained the names of 11 other dead men in two letters from Hanoi on Sunday. She called the State Department on Monday so that the families could be notified, she said.

In all cases, she said, the letters simply listed the man's name and military serial number with the word "dead."

"The letters didn't say whether the men had been found dead, or they had died in captivity or when they had died or what," Mr. Weiss continue. "They just said they were dead."

Mrs. Weiss said there was some evidence that three of the dead men, and possibly a fourth, had been captured alive.

Government officials said the Administration has firm evidence from the Hanoi radio and from photographs that six of the dead men had been captured alive.

"It's possible that they died of wounds, or disease or injuries from their air crash," Mrs. Weiss said, referring to the 17 deaths in general. "It would be incredible if none of the men had died after they were shot down. But I doubt they died of mistreatment."

Thant Makes Appeal

Special to The New York Times

UNITED NATIONS, N. Y., Nov. 25 — Secretary General Thant renewed his appeal to North Vietnam today to permit the Red Cross or other appropriate humanitarian organizations to see American war prisoners. He made a similar plea last February.

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