

The Plight of the P.O.W.'s

By H. ROSS PEROT

DALLAS—In October, 1969, I first became involved in efforts to secure the release of American prisoners being held by the North Vietnamese, Vietcong, Pathet Lao and Chinese. Our strategy was developed from numerous meetings with them, and with countries friendly to them.

The North Vietnamese do not want the American people to become aroused and outraged over "just 1,600 men." Consequently, it became necessary to educate and inform the American people about the plights of our prisoners.

The public pressure created by the American people's concern for these men has produced very tangible results. Since last Christmas, the men are receiving better food and medical treatment, the flow of mail coming out has increased seventeen-fold, the number of men identified and/or allowed to write has tripled, the rate of packages the men can receive has increased six-fold and the allowable size of this year's Christmas package has almost doubled.

For the past year we have been building what we refer to as a "pyramid." At the top of the pyramid is our national Government. We have asked Congress to assist this campaign in a number of ways. Every request has met with a quick, enthusiastic response. On May 1 we requested replicas of the cells and cages be placed in the rotunda of the Capitol. This was done. It was unprecedented.

We then requested that the House and Senate prepare strongly worded resolutions demanding the release of the prisoners. This, too, was done. The resolutions were delivered. The North Vietnamese released a film of life in a prison camp upon receipt of the House resolution.

We asked Congress to meet in joint session to express concern for the plight of these men. This has been done. It, too, was unprecedented.

We have visited privately with a number of Senators who disagree with the Administration's position on the war, asking their active support in gaining the release of the prisoners. To a man, we found the Senators to be aware, concerned, sympathetic and willing to take action to help these men. Again and again over the past year we have found that while there may be disagreement about the conduct of the war, our nation is united in its desire to gain the release of the prisoners.

We are now involved in what we refer to as the "Village Campaign." Cities, towns and regions across the

country are organizing independently, conducting massive letter-writing campaigns within each city, holding the mail in that city. At the end of the campaign a delegation of private citizens is selected, representing a profile of the community, to take the mail, visit with the North Vietnamese and seek the release of the men from that city. This lets the North Vietnamese see that it is not just the President, the House and Senate, the families and a handful of concerned citizens—it is the whole nation that wants these men back now.

The North Vietnamese don't need these men because they have no value after being interrogated. Their wives and children need them desperately. Their fate is in your hands. Would you make a series of small sacrifices for these men who have done so much for us?

Each time you put on or remove your socks, think of the prisoners. A common form of torture is to withhold a prisoner's socks. Without socks, the mosquitoes bite on his exposed feet causing the feet to swell two to three times their normal size. The prisoner then encounters all the problems of infection and malaria, without the benefit of medicine.

As you put on your socks each morning, ask yourself, "What am I going to do for these men today?" As you remove your socks in the evening, ask yourself, "What have I done for these men today? Have I done enough? Could I have done more?" Never forget that the men in the prison camps are made aware by newly captured prisoners of what you and I are doing to gain their release.

H. Ross Perot, a Dallas businessman, has been attempting for over a year to gain the release of American prisoners in North Vietnam.

Correction

In a recent article by Barbara Ondrasik on P.O.W.'s, some words were inadvertently dropped from the text. It should have read: "... There have been 790 fliers downed over the North. What happened to the other 461? Information released recently by Mrs. Cora Weiss of the Liaison Committee lists names of many men who, it is said, have never been detained in North Vietnam. Some of these men were known prisoners; have been identified from pictures or other sources. . . ."



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