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'Administrative Snafu'

How Army Held Up POW's Mail

Warren, Mich.

Staff Sergeant John C. Sexton Jr., who was released by the Viet Cong Friday, wrote a letter seven days after he was captured saying he was "not dead like everybody probably thinks." But his family did not learn of the letter until two years later, the soldier's father said yesterday.

The letter, addressed to "whoever is concerned" arrived at Army headquarters in Vietnam but was held there for almost two years.

John C. Sexton, who was to meet his son in Denver yesterday, said he "would like to know why the letter was held up that long" with the family not knowing whether John Jr., 23, was alive or dead.

The family had been told for two years that their son was missing and did not know he was a prisoner of the Viet Cong until last month when Sexton and his wife went to the Pentagon to review their son's file.

SAMPLE

Shortly before they went to Washington, the Army asked for a sample of their son's handwriting but did not tell the family why it was wanted, the elder Sexton said.

Sexton said he and his wife saw an Army major who

"pulled this letter out of this folder and we went after it. There was no doubt in our mind that it was written by John."

Until this time (September 26), the Army "had not mentioned the letter to me," Sexton, 49, said. "I intend yet to find who held it up over there (Vietnam)."

SNAFU

In Washington, the Pentagon said the family had been "told of the general contents" of the note shortly after it was found, but had not been given a copy in an "administrative snafu."

Pentagon officials said they had listed Sexton as missing for two years because they were uncertain of the note's authenticity, and that Washington officials did not discover until this summer that the note, held all the time in Vietnam, was handwritten.

LETTER

A handwriting analysis was then begun, officials said, and was completed last Tuesday when it was confirmed that Sexton was the writer. At that time, Sexton was moved from the missing list to the POW category.

The letter, written in the sergeant's hand, was addressed to "Whoever is concerned" and had a faded picture of Sexton attached to it.

"Don't be too alarmed but this is me (John Sexton Jr.). It was dated Aug. 19, 1969, seven days after Sexton's capture and said:

I am not dead, like everyone probably thinks. I am alive and well in a National Liberation Front hospital. As you know my track was destroyed and I have shrapnel in my leg and face, none of which is too serious because

they have all been treated well. The doctors have taken the shrapnel out and I have just a few scars.

"Whoever receives this letter, tell everyone I said hello, especially Marvin Harter and Rossback. (Army buddies). This is no hoax letter, so take care of yourself and maybe someday you can all go home alive. Your friend, John Sexton Jr." *United Press*