

# P.O.W. Is Freed by U.S. In Return for G.I. Release

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 11—A North Vietnamese lieutenant was released today as part of a one-for-one prisoner exchange initiated by the enemy, United States officials said.

These sources said that when the Vietcong released S. Sgt. John C. Sexton Jr. of the Army three days ago they told him that they expected the United States to reciprocate by releasing a North Vietnamese prisoner.

This was the first time that the enemy had seemed to accept the principle of reciprocity in an exchange of prisoners—long an American objective—and led to some hope here that this exchange might lead to others.

But the American officials said they had no reason to expect such a development and cautioned against drawing over-optimistic conclusions.

Officially, the United States does not have any enemy prisoners. They are turned over to South Vietnamese authorities upon capture. Today's release was carried out with the approval of Saigon, the American Embassy in Saigon said.

News of the release of the North Vietnamese prisoner was first made public by the United States Embassy in Saigon, which said that it was "in response to indications that the enemy would welcome such a release at a given time and place."

The embassy declined to describe what these "indications" were, but Washington sources said it was the message given to Sergeant Sexton, who was released in an enemy-controlled area of Cambodia near the South Vietnamese border.

The Washington sources said

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that no contact had been established with the enemy side, but that following the message given to Sergeant Sexton, a United States Army helicopter released the North Vietnamese prisoner at roughly the same place where Sergeant Sexton had been freed.

An escort of American helicopter gunships was provided in case of enemy ambush, but the area was quiet, the sources said.

In Saigon, the embassy said, "We have no assurance whatsoever at present that this reciprocal gesture will lead to the release of additional American prisoners. That, however, is the goal toward which we are working."

The Washington sources said that the North Vietnamese officer, whose name was not disclosed, had been told to inform his side that the allies hoped such exchanges would continue.

### U.S. Figures Cited

The Defense Department believes that 82 Americans are being held prisoner in South Vietnam, with 520 listed as missing in South Vietnam. The Pentagon says that 378 Americans are prisoners in North Vietnam. Hanoi says it holds only 339 Americans.

In addition, several hundred Americans are listed by the Pentagon as "missing" in North Vietnam or in other parts of Southeast Asia. Altogether, some 1,500 are believed to be either prisoners or missing.

Sergeant Sexton, who was captured in South Vietnam on Aug. 12, 1969, was carried on United States Government rolls as missing in action for most of his two years of captivity. Washington sources said that his category had recently been changed to that of prisoner of war after a letter had been found that supplied new information.

### Key Issue at Paris

The fate of the Americans held by the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese has been a major issue at the Paris peace talks on Vietnam. President Nixon has made release of all American prisoners a condition for the withdrawal of all American forces from South Vietnam.

The enemy has promised to release all prisoners by the end of the year if the United States agreed to announce by then a timetable for withdrawal of United States troops. The enemy has also demanded acceptance of a coalition government in Saigon without the participation of the Government of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

There have been periodic suggestions by the United States and South Vietnam for exchanges of prisoners, but these have never been accepted. Unilaterally, the Vietcong have released 24 Americans since 1965 and the North Vietnamese have released nine.

About 100 North Vietnamese have been returned to Hanoi authorities. Some 1,000 former Vietcong soldiers have been released in South Vietnam, United States officials said.

A Saigon spokesman said in Paris in July that South Vietnam was holding 37,616 prisoners, of which 8,600 were North Vietnamese regulars.

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