

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 25, 1971

First Letters From G.I.'s Held by the Vietcong

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 24—The first letters ever to reach the United States from American prisoners of war in South Vietnam tend to sound much alike, generally reflecting a tone of assurance that the prisoners are being adequately cared for.

Eighteen such letters are among the 1,001 turned over by the Communist delegations at the Paris peace talks Tuesday to the committee of Liaison with Families of Servicemen Detained in North Vietnam a peace group. In some cases, the letters, which the committee forwarded to the families were the first word in four years from men held captive in the South.

The messages, limited to 10 lines each, generally contain an assurance that the prisoner is in good health, that his basic needs are being met and that his family need not worry about his safety. The wording of the letters frequently was similar. Most of the letters contain personal messages to the families and some express anti-war sentiment.

Major Writes Wife

A typical message is the one sent by Maj. Floyd Harold Kushner, a 30-year-old Army Medical Corps doctor who has been missing since November, 1967. To his wife, Valerie, of Danville, Va. In a telephone interview, she read the following from her husband's letter:

"My health is fine. I am provided with all items necessary to sustain me. Adequate food, medical care, toiletries, as well as books and opportunities for exercise are provided. Do not worry about me."

James Alexander Daly, 24,

an Army sergeant from Brooklyn, has been missing in South Vietnam since January, 1968. In a letter to his mother, Mary, sergeant Daly wrote:

"I am in the best of health and have been receiving good treatment. I hope that you are doing the best you can to end the war, and peace for all to come."

Abel Larry Cavanaugh, a marine sergeant from Denver, wrote to his sister, Mrs. Robert Webster:

"I only hope this war ends soon, I am doing my best to help [end] the war because I know we don't belong here or were ever wanted. Peace in Vietnam I support. I want and I support our American people who work for peace. Many ask why. It means my coming home, S's."

Four Years in Captivity

Sergeant Cavanaugh, 22, has been a prisoner for four years.

Frank Gene Anton, 28, a chief warrant officer from Willingboro, N.J., has been missing since March, 1968. He wrote to his parents:

"I am in extremely good health. All of my basic needs, food and personal wise, are provided me."

Gustav A. Mehrer, 22, a private first class of Omaha, wrote to his family:

"My health is still good and I have everything that I had when I left home. Write me back so I can know your situation at home, work and changes. You can write back if you wish. Send photos if you wish."

The Mehrer family learned in August, 1969, that Private Mehrer was in a prisoner-of-

war camp. Three American prisoners were released from South Vietnam at that time and one of them had memorized only, "Gus, Omaha" as a message to let Private Mehrer's family know he was alive. Private Mehrer was reported missing in December, 1968.

Mrs. John A. Young of Gray's Lake, Ill., said she received a letter from her husband yesterday. Staff Sergeant Young, a 26-year-old Green Beret, had been missing since January, 1968.

'His Spirits Are High'

"He said that his spirits are high and that he was getting dental treatment because his teeth had gone bad," Mrs. Young said. "And he said that he is against the war."

Sgt. Jose Jesus Anzaldua Jr., of the Marines has been a prisoner since January, 1970. Sergeant Anzaldua wrote to his mother in Refugio, Tex., "I am in very good health and have been allowed to participate in physical activities."

Tape-recorded messages previously had been sent by Major Kushner and Sergeant Young, but the letters are the first written communication the men have had with their families.

Families of 339 prisoners in North Vietnam are permitted to correspond on a monthly basis with the prisoners through the liaison committee. The committee mailed 983 letters from 332 prisoners in the North in addition to the 18 letters from the prisoners in the South.

Cora Weiss, co-chairman of the liaison committee, said in New York that the letters from

Sound Much Alike

prisoners in South Vietnam demonstrated that the provisional revolutionary government in the South would cooperate with the committee in delivering mail to prisoners.

"The 18 letters were walked from South Vietnam to North and it took up to two months," she said.

She said the letters were flown from North Vietnam to Paris and then delivered to New York by a member of her committee, the Rev. Richard Fernandez. He said he received the letters from a representative of the North Vietnamese Embassy.

Mrs. Weiss said she had

mailed the letters to the prisoners' families.

Families who received mail are permitted to reply, Mrs. Weiss said. Letters to be delivered by the committee must be in New York City by Jan. 1, she said. Letters for prisoners in the South will be delivered to the provisional revolutionary government's embassy in Hanoi. Letters going to the North also will be taken to Hanoi.

Correspondence between prisoners and their families is limited to 10 lines per letter, she said, and the subjects that can be discussed are limited to family activities and health.