

'They must not be getting humane treatment if no neutral inspection is allowed'

Getting POWs Home

By Virginia Westover

"I FEEL President Nixon does care about the American prisoners . . . he's doing everything he can. People act like he has them. He doesn't; they're in North Vietnam, and he's tried everything to bring them home."

Mrs. James Evans, western regional co-ordinator of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, was commenting on the confusion in the wake of President Nixon's network TV discussion with CBS correspondent Dan Rather about conditions for total withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam.

(The President said the only barrier to full withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam was the prisoners of war.

(The statement was clarified the following day, however, in a dispatch from the White House, stating that the President was "not dropping" his commitment to South Vietnam by tying troop withdrawals from Indochina solely to the release of American POWs.)

Maerose Evans, whose husband, a Navy com-



MES. JOSEPH BORS, GORDON PAGE
There will have to be some safeguards

mander, has been missing for six years and eight months, and other families interviewed by and large backed government efforts in handling the sensitive issue of the POWs. Most agree it is becoming more and more of a political football in this election year.

Julie Hill, whose husband, Gordon, was shot down in his F-4 Phantom

jet 20 months ago, said sadly: "The whole thing just keeps going around and around. The President's remarks really don't change anything. I don't know what to think."

The holiday season made the young mother "more than normally depressed" because one of her closest friends — her husband's flying buddy — was killed December 26 during the



MRS. WILLIAM BUTLER, MRS. JAMES EVANS
Political football with a sensitive issue

five-day bombing period.

Alice Stratton, wife of POW Richard Stratton, a Navy commander, said she had "only partially read" the news stories and felt she was not qualified to remark on the issue.

Over the holidays Mrs. Stratton and her three young sons received four pieces of mail from the commander. She was disheartened that he — and the other 339 acknowledged POWs — have not been permitted to receive mail.

(Hanoi rejected more than 900 gift packages intended for American POWs, despite the fact that North Vietnam announced they would be accepted.)

"You put so much concern and love in to the packages," she said. "I dread the day they're returned to our home."

Mrs. Joseph C. Bors, whose husband was declared MIA (missing in action) in April 1968, said: "It's the same statement Nixon's been making all along."

Mrs. William Butler put it differently: "It's another statement, and we'll see what happens. Some things are said, and you don't know what exactly is behind them."

Her husband, an Air Force captain, was listed as MIA in November 1967, until August 1969, when a released American prisoner said he had seen him. She heard from her husband this Christmas.

Both Mrs. Ronald Breuch and Mrs. Gordon Page, other members of the 55 Bay Area POW-MIA families, agreed that the present U.S. stance — to leave a residual force of American troops in South



MRS. GORDON HILL
... just keeps going around and around

Vietnam — is our only chance of getting the POWs back.

Mrs. Breuch pointed out that "people seem to ignore the fact that there are prisoners in countries other than North Vietnam (Laos, Cambodia, Red China and South Vietnam)."

"No provisions have been made for those in the other countries," she said. Her brother, Major Paschal Boggs USMC, is MIA.

Mrs. Page added: "If we withdraw and get back the acknowledged 339 POWs (it is believed there are 378), there will have to be a safeguard that there be an immediate accounting for the remaining 1300-odd MIAs."

Mrs. Harding A. Smith said flatly, "I see no assurance that Hanoi will account for the MIAs." Her husband has been declared MIA.

Like most, Mrs. Smith feels nothing has changed, despite Nixon's comments and the ultimatum from Hanoi that the U.S. must abandon its policy of Vietnamization of the war to obtain the prisoners' freedom.

"They've been saying this all along," she said. "If you read the seven-point peace plan, it all hinges on troop withdrawal and the end of Vietnamization."

In the five and a half years, since her husband was shot down over Laos, Bernice Smith has been speaking before groups as a representative of the League of Families.

"I try not to make political statements," she said. "I feel my husband deserves the support of all people."

"How do I feel? Well, let me put it this way: I don't know what more our government can do. I strongly feel it's the obligation of the other countries that signed the Geneva Convention that they respect it."

"The POWs must not be getting humane treatment if Hanoi won't allow neutral inspection."

"It's heartbreaking that the men are becoming an issue, rather than their treatment," she concluded.

VIVA: Bracelets With a Purpose

VIVA bracelets bearing the name of a Bay Area prisoner of war or servicemen missing in action are now available through the National League of Families, Post Office Box 207, Mountain View 94040.

The bracelets, to call

people's attention to the POW/MIA plight, are priced at \$2.50 for nickel and \$3 for copper.

The wearer is expected to vow to keep the VIVA bracelet on until the Red Cross is allowed to inspect the prison camps.