

Already Planning For POW Return

It was inevitable that boll-weevil bureaucracy would step in and construct a complex plan to "welcome" the American POWs when they are released.

There isn't much likelihood that the prison gates will open until every American serviceman is out of Indochina and the warships have steamed off. At least, that has been the stand the captors have taken for years, occasionally adding a demand that all U.S. economic aid to the Saigon government must stop, too.

But in the face of that stubborn ultimatum, which no amount of bombing seems able to splinter, we now are preparing the machinery for the grand homecoming.

The POW will undergo a complete physical, including a search for worms. The shrinks will have a go at him, to determine—to their own satisfaction, at least—whether the years of pitiless confinement, frustration and yearning caused any cranial short circuits.

Somebody else in the bureaucratic setup will want to be assured that the endless propaganda heaped on them as POWs, much of it anti-American, did not alter their outlook toward the U.S. of A.

The counting rooms will tally what they are owed in back pay, and the Internal Revenue Service will take the first steps to obtain its cut—under threat of sending the recalcitrant to U.S. jails.

Ultimately, as was the case with the early moonwalkers quarantined at the space center to avoid contaminating mankind with lunar lice, the POWs will be able to do the only thing they've dreamed of during their awful ordeal: fall into the loving arms of their wives, their girls and their families. That will be their ultimate therapy.

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THE CONCERN for POWs is being increasingly illuminated by an organization named Voices In Vital America. It was begun by student activists in California five years ago with a charter that concerned itself with the ecology and other crises, including the matter of the POWs. Now it focuses its attention on the prisoners only.

VIVA is a burr on the seats of the consciences of Washington, Hanoi and the redoubts of the Viet Cong and the Pathet Lao. Its people, most of them volunteers, keep peppering away at the White House, State Department, Defense Department and Congress with letters and postcards.

For a modest sum, the headquarters of the organization, located at 10966 Le Conte Ave., Los Angeles, provides bumper stickers, engraved wristbands and literature on the organization and its goals.

There is also an office in Washington and New York. The New York office is run by Kathy O'Connor, a young student nurse from Warren, Mich., whose brother was shot down while flying a helicopter during Tet. He is listed by the Defense Department as missing.

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"WE'VE BEEN SENDING him mail and packages ever since," Miss O'Connor told us with the brave facade of most families of the men. "They've all come back. But we keep trying. . ."

"Our ultimate goal, of course, is the return of all the men. But there are intermediate goals, too. Right now we're pressing the North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong and the Pathet Lao—through all available channels—to give the world a head-count on the men they are holding.

"The last time Hanoi offered figures, 339 names, that only included men imprisoned in the north. We know—from 18 letters received last year from prisoners being held by the Viet Cong—that there must be many more being held in remote regions of South Vietnam, sharing the rough life of the VC. Surely, there are others in Laos and Cambodia. Our list of POWs and MIAs numbered 1760 as of last week."

VIVA's more than a million members, Miss O'Connor stresses, range through the full spectrum of Hawks to Doves, Republicans and Democrats, Christians and Jews.