

Behind The POW Release

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Washington

The response of the Nixon administration and Congress to the release of three American prisoners of war is to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird boorishly and inaccurately attacked the two women who went to Hanoi to greet their men as being "in violation of the Geneva Convention," which in point of fact makes no mention of family members.

Analysis and Opinion

The House Internal Security Committee acted with great haste by approving a bill to prevent any further unauthorized visits to North Vietnam.

LAIRD

Laird was understandably annoyed that Cora Weiss, the leader of an anti-war organization, had succeeded where he had failed and, against his record of one raid on an empty prison camp, was actually bringing three pilots home midway in a presidential campaign.

He obviously found it intolerable that Minnie Lee Gartley, the mother of one pilot, and Olga Charles, the wife of another, were being pictured visiting bombed-out villages and commiserating with the peasant victims of United States "pinpoint targeting," of military installations.

LEADER

Mrs. Weiss, a leader of the liaison committee with the POW families, is a strong-minded woman who does not hesitate to join battle with the brass. She had no intention of letting the prisoners be "confiscated" by the military.

In a development that must have maddened the White House, she routed the return flight through China, where there are no military or diplomatic personnel to board the plane and demand the prisoners in the name of the Pentagon and the White House.

That is what happened to previous expeditions. Father Daniel Berrigan, who has suffered many vicissitudes since, brought three prisoners of war to Vientiane, where they were commandeered by representatives of the ambassador and never seen again by Berrigan and his traveling companion, Dr. Howard Zinn of Boston University.

1968

Later in 1968, another liaison committee delegation brought out a trio, which included Lieutenant Robert Frishman, a career Navy officer, who subsequently toured the country under Pentagon auspices, describing prison torture.

The National League of Families, the patient and generally pro-administration organization, is watching developments with acute concern.

Evelyn Grubb, the league chairman and a member of its board, which meets regularly at the White House and with Henry Kissinger, was incensed by both Laird's statement and the House committee's action.

VIEW

"I would go and inspect bombed villages if they asked me to," said the normally reserved Mrs. Grubb.

"I would do anything.

"And if Congress is going to forbid any more travel by peace groups, they better find an alternate course. They're the only ones bringing out letters and who else is bringing out any men?"

The national league will have its annual convention in two weeks.

Kissinger has promised to make a public address, and both presidential candidates have been invited.

The league has been "non-political," but the members are becoming restive, and a minority has begun to question whether bombing is the best way to get the prisoners home.