
POWs Won't Go Back to the War

Washington

As an apparent conciliatory gesture toward North Vietnam, a Defense Department official pledged yesterday that released American prisoners of war would have nothing further to do with Vietnam combat activities.

The statement, made to the House Armed Services Committee, was aimed at encouraging Hanoi to release more of its nearly 400 American prisoners.

Hanoi had said last month when it set free three captured pilots that one reason more men had not been released was because some former prisoners had been used "in war activities" in Indochina.

Dr. Roger E. Shields, the top Pentagon aide on prisoner affairs, said the United States would abide by the Geneva convention which forbids released prisoners from taking part "on active military service."

Article 117 of the convention has been interpreted, Shields said, to rule out any participation, "direct or indirect" in support of combat activities.

In answer to questions, Shields said that latest information indicated that camp and living conditions for American prisoners have improved, partly, as the result of American efforts to focus attention on the prisoners.

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