

Nixon Visits POW Kin, With Vow

WASHINGTON — (AP) — President Nixon made an unexpected appearance today before a gathering of wives and families of U.S. prisoners of war and missing in action.

He promised them he "will never let you down" in efforts to obtain release of the men and declared draft dodgers and deserters "will pay a price" for their actions.

"It would be the most immoral thing I could think of to give amnesty to draft dodgers and those who deserted," Nixon told his cheering audience.

Annual Meeting

He made an unannounced visit to the meeting of the annual convention of the League of Families of POWs-MIAs where about 1500 delegates jammed a hotel ballroom.

Nixon said he could not comment about the "very intensive negotiations" that had been under way in an effort to find peace in South Vietnam. He said he did not want to raise false hopes or to make any comment that could jeopardize the effort.

But he told the delegates that he will insist upon two main conditions:

"There will be no settlement that "imposes a Communist government on the people of South Vietnam" and "under no conditions will we abandon our prisoners of war and our missing in action."

And he declared: "We cannot leave their fate to the good will of the enemy."

Tears in Eyes

Nixon said he was seeking reasonable conditions and "an honorable and reasonable peace."

There were tears in the eyes of some of the women when Nixon made his surprise appearance. When he went through the crowd one woman kissed his hand and another took off a POW bracelet she was wearing and gave it to the President.



PRESIDENT NIXON LISTENS TO AN APPEAL

He assures an unidentified POW relative he'll fight for men's return

—AP Photo

Nixon took the occasion to restate firmly his stand on amnesty. He said that two and one-half million young Americans faced with the responsibility of serving their country in war chose to serve rather than desert.

Then he said it would be immoral for him to give amnesty to draft dodgers or deserters and he said: "Your loved ones paid a price — those who deserted will pay a price for their choice."

Thanks Families

He concluded by saying: "You have never been away from my thoughts. You have never been away from my prayers, and there's nothing I want more than to bring your loved ones home and I will never let you down."

Nixon also thanked the families for backing him up on what he called his "hardest decision" — to mine the

harbors of Haiphong and Hanoi and to order the bombing of military targets in North Vietnam last May.

The President commented that he got "precious little support" from those who, he said, are called the opinion leaders of the country.

Question

"Who are the opinion leaders?" Nixon asked.

"They are supposed to be the leaders of the media, great editors, publishers, television commentators and the rest.

"They are supposed to be the presidents of universities and the professors . . . those who have the educational background to understand the importance of great decisions and are expected to stand by the President of the United States when he makes a terribly difficult and potentially unpopular decision.

"They are supposed to be some of our top businessmen."

He declared that the families of the POWs and MIAs who had suffered so much, "stood by that decision and I thank you very much.

That, too, drew applause, and Nixon maintained that his decision for the mining and bombing "was the right decision militarily. . . It has been effective."

Nixon also asked for their "continued support" not in the election necessarily, he said, but in his efforts to achieve "an honorable peace — one that will contribute to peace in the world."