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POW Relatives Cheer Nixon Vow

*Washington Post Service***Washington**

President Nixon said yesterday that he will "never" abandon Americans held in North Vietnam and that he will not "leave their fate to the good will of the enemy."

The President made his promises, and the implied criticism of Senator George McGovern, in a brief, hard-hitting speech before an enthusiastic, emotional audience of families of prisoners and missing in action.

As the President walked into the ballroom of the Statler Hilton Hotel here, Mrs. Wesley Ratzel, mother of a POW, threw her arms around him and kissed him. When he left, another woman gave him a bracelet with the name of her missing husband on it. He promised to wear it.

'IMMORAL'

When Mr. Nixon declared that it would be "the most immoral thing I could think of to give amnesty to draft dodgers and those who deserted," he received a standing ovation.

Only a handful of the approximately 1000 persons attending the meeting of the National League of Families of Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia failed to join in the prolonged applause.

After the address, as the President got into his car, he heard the first criticism when Mrs. David Gray of Tampa, Fla., asked, "Do they have to stay there for Mr. Thieu?"

The car door closed as she asked her question, and Mr. Nixon did not reply. Mrs. Gray said her husband, Captain David Gray, has been a POW since January, 1967.

The organization generally

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has supported the administration, but in May it called the Vietnamization program a failure as far as it concerned freedom for POWs.

In his comment on "the good will of the enemy" and on the amnesty question, Mr. Nixon was drawing a contrast between his position and McGovern's, but he never mentioned the Democratic nominee McGovern, who had also been invited to appear, declined "with regret" because of other engagements.

Mr. Nixon pre-empted an appearance at the convention by presidential aide Henry A. Kissinger. Mr. Nixon said he found he had time and decided to substitute for Kissinger. The decision was made so hastily that normal Secret Service advance work had not been done.

The President spoke for about eight minutes without notes.

PARIS

While he described the negotiation in Paris as "very intensive," he said he did not want to raise "false hopes" and would jeopardize the peace talks there if he discussed them.

However, he declared that "we shall not agree to any settlement that imposes a Communist government" on South Vietnam, and "we shall, under no circumstances, abandon our POWs and MIAs."

Moreover, he said, "We shall not betray our allies" and "we shall not stain the honor of the United States."

McGovern has said that he is confident that Hanoi would release POWs as he withdrew the final American forces from Southeast Asia. And he has said he favors

amnesty for those who fled the country or otherwise avoided Vietnam service and would consider deserters on a case-by-case basis.

'PRICE'

"Your loved ones," the President told the families, "have and are paying a price for their choice (to serve). And those who have deserted America will pay a price for their choice."

He assailed critics who opposed his May 8 decision to mine North Vietnamese harbors. Calling the decision "the hardest" he has had to make, he said "it was the right decision militarily" and "has been effective."

America's opinion leaders, instead of rallying to his support, were openly critical, he said, referring to editors, television commentators, university presidents and "some of our top businessmen."

They gave him "precious little support," he said.

THANKS

"The most heartwarming thing to me was that those who had so much at stake, those who had suffered too much, the great majority of those whose husbands and loves ones are POWs or MIAs, stood by that decision, and I thank you very much."

"You have never been away from my thoughts," he said, "and you have never been away from my prayers, and there is nothing that I want more than to bring your loved ones home, and I will never let you down."

The bracelet was given to the President by Nellie Davis of El Paso, Tex. She said her husband, Army Sergeant First Class Ricardo Davis, has been mission since May, 1969.