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Publicity Sought for Asia POWs

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A letter-writing campaign in behalf of American men missing in action in Southeast Asia is being conducted in hopes that publicity will help improve treatment of those MIAs who are prisoners.

The campaign, begun two weeks ago by the Santa Clara County (Calif.) POW-MIA League, is aimed at three newspapers, the three major television networks and NBC's Today Show.

As of yesterday. The Washington Post had received 95 copies of the form letter, all signed by different individuals. Other newspapers on the list are The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times.

The three paragraph letter says:

"The end of the war is at hand. Will we really know the fate of all the prisoners and missing?"

"It is imperative that North Vietnam be made aware of the fact that the American people are concerned not only about the men whom North Vietnam admits holding but with the approximately 1,300 men missing in all of Indochina—North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia.

"By North Vietnam's own admission, men were captured whose names do not appear on their so-called official list. Some of the men missing in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos must be alive. The press through coverage of the plight of these men has helped to improve their treatment. Please help again by publicizing the facts concerning the missing men. Without your cooperation, these men will remain anonymous, forgotten, abandoned forever."

The letter was composed by Bernice Smith, whose husband, Air Force Col. Harding E. Smith Jr., has been listed as missing in action in Laos since June 3, 1966.

Mrs. Smith said the campaign is "in the second printing," with 2,000 copies sent out and 2,000 more being prepared for distribution.

"The time has come that the American people be made aware about the discrepancies—the men who we know were once alive in North Vietnam, but do not appear on any list of captured," Mrs. Smith said.

She said the "Communist history of treatment" of men whose capture was never made public is not good. "We don't want it to be like the end of the Korean war, where so many were unaccounted for," she said.

Defense Department records show that as of Nov. 25, there were 554 known prisoners and 1,151 men listed as missing. Only six men are officially listed as captured in Laos, compared to 297 missing there.