

## Poster

## MIA Culpa

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A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

Contrary to what has generally been reported, we seem to have about two-and-a-half million men missing in action. These MIAs are the men who fought in Vietnam and the action they were lost in is the political action coming out of the White House.

The Vietnam vet has disappeared, and if you'd believe what the administration wants you to, the war was fought alone by the 600 prisoners of war slowly coming out of the internment camps. They are the only guys who're getting a victory parade. The other veterans are getting their benefits cut.

The political uses to which this small group of American POWs can be put is next to limitless. For years Nixon offered them as the last excuse for carrying on the war and now they serve as the focus of a patriotic uproar which distracts people from entertaining the thought that in the end the President bugged out of the war just like he said he'd never do.

All the saluting, gulps and God-bless-Americas fill the air with so much random noise it's hard to consider the possibility that Kissinger and Nixon may also have signed a secret agreement or come to a secret understanding with North Vietnam. Perhaps that much-talked-about two-and-a-half billion dollars in reparations or good-will payments is actually the price to ransom those guys out of there.

They're worth the money, to be sure, but this clangorous, red, white and blue fuss almost seems designed to make us think that by taking care of them, we've discharged our obligations to the two-and-a-half million who are missing in the Washington action. It's fine for these fellows to have their \$100,000 in tax-free back pay; (make it \$200,000) and it's nice they were offered free cars and trips and even that they play along with the embarrassing tattoo of adulation for "the Commander in Chief," but the Commander in Chief, in his other, more important capacity of President, is trying to cut the pension benefits to Vietnam war amputees.

He's doing his level best to keep the GI Bill educational benefits so low as to be next to useless. In terms of the dollar's purchasing power the Vietnam vet is receiving something like a quarter of the school assistance that his father got when he came back from the Second World War and Korea.

Not only that, but the Vietnam vet is having trouble actually getting what little is owed him. A recent article in the UCLA campus newspaper estimates that 15 per cent of the vets on campus are finding their payments blocked or delayed for weeks and months.

Clearly, the Commander-in-Chief likes some of his soldiers better than others; and best of all, he likes the POWs. The POWs bristle at the remark that while the North Vietnamese couldn't brainwash them in years of captivity, their superiors were able to do it in a matter of minutes at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. Even so they do display an admirable unity of enthusiasms for peace with honor and other such slogans.

The POWs are suited to the Commander-in-Chief's tastes, being overwhelmingly white, obedient, professional officers. In contrast, most of the two-and-a-half million missing vets were a racially polyglot hoard of conscripted grunts.

Many didn't have the money to buy their way out of the war into college or the clout to get into the National Guard and sit it out. They aren't Nixon's kind of people and they made it worse on themselves when a few thousand of them had their march past the Capitol, tore their medals off their chests and threw them into the street. Even the generals who had phony citations written up for themselves kept the decorations they didn't deserve until they were forcibly removed from their heroic bosoms.

The Vietnam vets are ideal for punishment. They're unorganized and so have no power either to protect themselves or lobby for their own interests. When they filtered back from the Nam, the idea of joining the old line veterans' organizations like the Legion and VFW was repellent. They are a diffuse mass whom, you might think, remnants of the peace movement would try to help. But the old peacenik crowd is too taken up with rescuing *their* POWs by getting amnesty for them.

The Vietnam vets are a good group to kick around. They lost the war, didn't they? Peace with honor has to be blamed on somebody and it can't be blamed on Nixon or the diplomats or the generals or the North Vietnamese; so who's left? Those guys went over there and smoked dope when they should have been fighting.

Forget them and cheer the 600 real Americans who won this war. Believe them when they say peaceniks prolonged it with complaints and Nixon shortened it with his bombing; but when they're all back and throats are hoarse, let's scout around and try to find our missing in action.

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