

POW Extras Opposed by Pentagon

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The Pentagon is opposing proposals to provide early retirement and bonus payments to American servicemen who were prisoners of war in Indochina.

In a letter to Sen. John C. Stennis (D-Miss.), chairman of the Armed Services Committee, the Defense Department said it opposed legislation providing these special benefits to the Vietnam POWs.

Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine), a sponsor of the legislation, said it appeared the Defense Department feels "that POWs from the Indochina conflict do not merit special benefits."

In a letter to Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger, Muskie said, "I was disappointed that your department's correspondence was so negative and did not suggest any positive proposals which you would favor concerning special benefits for these prisoners of war."

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The bill, sponsored by Muskie and Sens. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) and William D. Hathaway (D-Maine), would give POWs double-time credit toward retirement for time spent as prisoners and award them per diem pay as if they had been stationed in Saigon.

The Pentagon said it opposed early retirement for POWs because "retirement after 20 years service without regard to age is a liberal system under any criterion."

The Defense Department letter also warned against the impact of such an action on World War II and Korean War POWs.

The Defense Department said it opposed the per diem proposal because those who did receive such pay were in Vietnam on temporary duty.

"Such a person was not a true counterpart of the prisoner of war," the letter said. "Servicemen on official tour of duty in Vietnam, their true counterparts, were not entitled to per diem pay."