

Army Wants to Pay Travel to POW Rites

The Pentagon announced its support yesterday of a bill passed in the Senate Friday that would authorize government assistance for funeral travel expenses for relatives of American prisoners of war and men once classified as missing in action in Southeast Asia.

"When the bill becomes law the department will expeditiously provide those additional supporting services authorized for the families designated by the Congress," Pentagon spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim said.

The bill was introduced by Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kan.) and quickly passed by a voice vote of the Senate without the usual committee study and hearings. Sen. Dole said he would ask the House leadership to bring the bill up for a vote Monday.

The congressional action and Department of Defense response follows a story in The Washington Post Friday about Cecile Abbott of Sacramento, Calif., who thought it "inequitable," and "shabby" that the government would not pay travel expenses for herself and her 12-year-old son to attend the burial in Arlington Cemetery of her husband, Navy Capt. John Abbott, a POW who died in captivity in North Vietnam.

Mrs. Abbott said that the

government transported to stateside reunions families of 556 POW's released by Hanoi last year and brought more than 500 of them to a White House reception, but the government could not provide funeral transportation for families of 23 dead POW's including her husband, released by Hanoi earlier this month.

The Pentagon has stressed that such families receive a death gratuity of from \$800 to \$3,000, depending upon rank, and that this stipend can be used for travel expenses.

Mrs. Abbott has said her concern is more one of principle than of money. She has had many offers of financial assistance from the public since the story appeared, she said yesterday, but she has asked would be donors instead to see if the other 22 families needed assistance.

"Just because men come home in a coffin does not make them any less heroes than the ones who came back alive," said Mrs. Abbott.

Sen. Dole's bill declares that "The United States owes no lesser degree of respect, honor or solicitude to the memories of the men who died in captivity and their families than in the cases of those who survived and returned alive."