

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON, D.C.



REPLY TO
ATTN OF:

USAFMPC (AFPMSC)
RANDOLPH AFB TEXAS 78148

18 December 1969

Dear Air Force Next of Kin

On 12 December 1969, President and Mrs. Nixon met in the White House with 21 wives and five mothers of Air Force, Navy, Marine, and Army members who are missing in action or captured in North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Laos. The President and First Lady would like to have met with all of the families, but obviously that was not practical. Final selections were made by the White House, and both enlisted personnel and officers were represented. You will be interested to know that nine Air Force wives attended the session.

President Nixon assured the wives and mothers that the prisoner problem will continue to receive the highest priority within his Administration. He stated that our government will do everything possible to have the prisoner of war issue handled on a humane basis apart from the political and military issues of the war itself. The President remarked that, while there are those who disagree with his Plan for Peace in Vietnam, the subject of proper treatment and release of prisoners of war is one on which all Americans should be united. He indicated further that there would be no precipitous withdrawal which could leave the prisoner issue unresolved, noting that such a withdrawal would also endanger the lives of thousands of South Vietnamese as well as imperil the security of remaining US forces. President Nixon expressed his deep respect for the bravery of the hundreds of wives, children, parents, and other relatives who have now lived so long not knowing whether their loved ones are dead or alive. Additional comments made by the President at a press conference following the meeting with the 26 ladies are attached.

On the evening prior to the session in the White House, the wives and mothers were guests of honor at a dinner which was attended by the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Air Force, Secretary of the Navy, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and a number of other governmental and military dignitaries. All reaffirmed their determination to assist in resolving the prisoner question.

US Senator Robert P. Griffin (Michigan) spoke in the Senate on 10 December 1969 in support of a US Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees) national project in behalf of prisoners of war held by the enemy in Southeast Asia. The project calls for Americans to send greeting cards and letters to Minister Xuan Thuy, the North Vietnamese chief delegate in Paris, and to include a message requesting the release of names of prisoners, humane treatment in accordance with the Geneva Convention,

and the early repatriation of the prisoners. Senator Griffin asked that the cards and letters be addressed to:

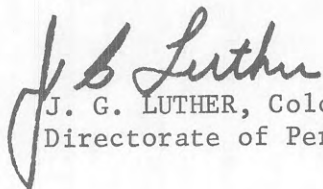
Project Xuan Thuy
Box 2600
Washington, D.C. 20013

After they are received in Washington, the Jaycees will arrange for their delivery to the North Vietnamese leaders. For more information on this project, we suggest you contact the nearest Jaycee Chapter.

On 10 December 1969, North Vietnam announced in a propaganda release that Radio Hanoi would broadcast recorded messages from US captured personnel in connection with the holiday season. Thus far, five Air Force prisoners have been allowed to broadcast messages, and their families have been notified. All five were known to be captured prior to receipt of the messages; however, in three of the cases, this is the first communication that has been received from them. Of the three, one has been downed for over four years, the second for three and a half years, and the third for almost three years. Similar messages were broadcast by one Marine and four Navy captured personnel. No prisoner mail has been received since August 1969 when a number of letters were hand carried back to this country by the peace activists who accompanied Captain Rumble, Lieutenant Frishman, and Seaman Hegdahl after their release. It is conceivable that North Vietnam may release additional letters because of Christmas and New Year, as has happened in the past, although we have no information to substantiate this possibility. We will keep you advised.

We have attached a copy of Secretary Laird's Christmas message to the families of missing and captured American servicemen. All of us in the Casualty Division would also like to extend our best wishes to you during this Christmas Season and to reaffirm our pledge to be of assistance to you in every way possible.

Sincerely



J. G. LUTHER, Colonel, USAF
Directorate of Personnel Services

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1. Remarks of President Nixon
2. Secretary Laird's Christmas Message

DECEMBER 12, 1969

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
FOLLOWING A MEETING WITH WIVES AND MOTHERS
OF PRISONERS OF WAR AND OF SERVICEMEN MISSING IN ACTION
THE ROOSEVELT ROOM

AT 10:50 A.M.

Ladies and gentlemen:

I have the very great honor to present in this room today five of the most courageous women I have had the privilege to meet in my life.

Mrs. Nixon and I have met with 26 women, of which these are a part, representing approximately 1500 women, mothers and wives of American servicemen who are missing in Vietnam and who are or may be prisoners of war. Some of these men have been prisoners or missing for as long as five years, most of them two to three years.

Insofar as the treatment of prisoners is concerned, it would probably not be inaccurate to say that the record in this war is one of the most unconscionable in the history of warfare. And there have been, of course, some very bad examples in past wars, as we know.

What I have assured these very courageous women is that, first, in reaching a settlement of the war that an integral part of any settlement that is agreed to must be a settlement that is satisfactory on the prisoner issue and, second, that clearly apart from reaching an overall settlement of the war that this Government will do everything that it possibly can to separate out the prisoner issue and have it handled as it should be, as a separate issue on a humane basis.

Finally, I would simply add that while we all know that there is disagreement in this country about the war in Vietnam and while there is dissent about it on several points, that on this issue, the treatment of prisoners of war, that there can be and there should be no disagreement.

The American people, I am sure, are unanimous in expressing their sympathy to these women, to their children, and also in supporting their Government's attempt to get the Government of North Vietnam and the VC to respond to the many initiatives which we have undertaken to get this issue separated out and prior to the time we can do something to end the war.

I understand they will be here to answer questions.

END

AT 10:54 A.M. EST

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