

Meeting with POW/MIA Wives

During the period 5 to 7 May 1972, the wives of the two most senior and among the most long time Navy POWs, Mrs. Jim (Sibyl) Stockdale and Mrs. Jim (Jane) Denton, were staying with Mouza and me while attending a conference of POW/MIA families. These long-suffering wives, parents and other dependents had waited, in some cases as long as eight years, for release of their loved ones, or for information about them in the case of those who are missing. Their presence in Washington was an important one because it helped to force the political system to focus more meaningfully on their problems. On the fifth of May, for example, Senator McGovern, already a strong candidate for the Democratic nomination for President, sent his associate, Frank Mankiewicz, to talk to the families, and then on Saturday, the sixth of May, the White House sent a Mr. Dolph Droge to talk to the families. Although he was a very competent man, he was an unfortunate choice because he was only expert in the field of Vietnamese history and cultural background, and was not able to talk at all about the POW/MIA situation. This left the families very concerned and frustrated

over the lack of interest at the White House. Sunday morning at breakfast Sibyl Stockdale and Jane Denton, two magnificent women who had carried not only the load of their own families but also had served as the leaders for the whole organization of families of POWs and MIAs, spoke up in the most forthright terms about their concern and their concern as to the great drop in morale within the organization of families. After they left the house to go to a Sunday morning meeting, I talked the problem over with Mouza and concluded that I ought to go down and try to speak to the families to give them my own view that the President had remained steadfast in his intention not to ease the pressure on North Vietnam until the prisoners were released and the missing accounted for. I did so, walking on to the stage and interrupting the program in order to get across my own personal commitment and that of the Administration, and then took questions. The questions were good, hard and tough, and demonstrated that Sibyl and Jane had not been amiss in their estimate that these long-suffering families needed some personal attention from the White House. Buoyed up by the very obvious, favorable reaction that they had had to my visit, I concluded that I must stop by the White House and make sure that Henry Kissinger was aware that the visit by an

uninformed White House representative had been counterproductive, and that something productive from the White House was required in the immediate future.

It was the only time I had ever dropped in on Henry unannounced. He came into the reception room, obviously perturbed at my arrival. I let him have it in no uncertain terms that I thought the White House had let down these families. Henry was infuriated and an acrimonious exchange took place. I did not record the details, but on the way home again made notes of the important points about his philosophy that stood out as he explained himself as to why more was not possible. as follows: See Tape 3A 6.

This has a haunting familiarity with some of the themes that Henry is expressing in November 1970, on the Army-Navy game train.