

APR 8 1966

MARIANNE MEANS' WASHINGTON:

## Delicate Problem:

# POW Exchanges

CPYRGHT By MARIANNE MEANS

CIA

WASHINGTON: Behind the scenes of the Viet Nam war an agonizing attempt goes on to swap prisoners of war with the Viet Cong.

The failure of all efforts thus far is forcing a reappraisal of the U.S. Government's role in dealing with the problem of wartime prisoner exchanges. Is enough being done? Are the right things being done?

It is natural that in a war, public concern should be directed primarily at the mounting lists of dead and wounded. The tragic plight of the prisoners, however, has recently been dramatized by the apparent collapse of a hoped-for swap of Augustus Hertz, Agency for International Development official, for a Viet Cong terrorist.



MEANS

The secret efforts to free Hertz, who was seized by Viet Cong in a Saigon suburb last February, have involved Sen. Robert Kennedy; Chester Cooper, former White House special assistant; Abba Schwartz, former administrator of the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs, as well as the distraught Hertz family and several private citizens.

The Hertz case focused attention on the fact that the U.S. has no apparatus for keeping track of the fate of prisoners; no one agency or individual with specific responsibility for attempting to gain their freedom; no system for providing information and guidance, or possibly a little comfort, to their families; and no organized method of coordinating the efforts of the U.S. Government and independent bodies like the International Red Cross.

The Viet Nam prisoners are the current problem, but the way they are handled sets the pattern for possible future difficulties elsewhere. There are now 212 U.S. military men missing and believed to be prisoners of the Viet Cong. Five U.S. civilians are captive, including Hertz, three missionaries, and Douglas Ramsey, a foreign service official assigned to AID.

CPYRGHT

Cooper, who left the White House staff last month, would like to see new emphasis on U.S. efforts to free prisoners. He plans to send a report to the State Dept. next week proposing a new inter-agency prisoner coordinating committee.

Such a committee was first suggested by A. Burke Hertz, a Virginia lawyer and the prisoner's brother. Hertz felt that a special body was needed to stimulate the efforts of the Red Cross and others and to coordinate the information and ideas of the State Dept., the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Dept. of Defense.

Because of his chairmanship of a subcommittee on refugees, Sen. Edward Kennedy has also become interested in improving the techniques of attempting prisoner exchanges. Sen. Kennedy has insistently pressured the State Dept. to pay more attention to both the question of caring for refugees and of rescuing prisoners in foreign countries.

Sen. Kennedy believes the Red Cross is the best agency to negotiate an exchange and has had several conferences with Red Cross officials on the subject. He has promised to dig deeper into the problem at a hearing on Vietnamese refugees scheduled for early May.

Officials realize that negotiations for prisoner swaps are very sensitive and must be conducted in secret. And they know that if the Viet Cong is in no mood for exchanges, none can be made, no matter what the U.S. does.

Yet there is ample precedent for exchanges and therefore enough hope to warrant continued efforts. During the Indochinese war, for example, the French and Vietnamese were able to exchange prisoners despite their bitter hatred.

Reuter Headline Service