

POWS: prisoners of policy

One of the saddest news developments in some time has surfaced this week. The Prisoner of War (POW), long the forgotten victim of the Southeast Asian conflict, has suddenly become a political campaign issue.

Saying that the North Vietnamese were attempting to use three POWs for propaganda purposes, Vice President Agnew charged that antiwar groups were impeding government negotiation efforts.

And with an apparent sense of righteous wrath, Sen. McGovern retorted that the Nixon Administration had interfered with the release of the three, ultimately causing the roundabout release route of the three prisoners.

All this political hay-making is appalling. It is disgusting to see the POWs become the diplomatic ping-pong balls of presidential politics.

Both sides of the campaign are guilty of grossly misplacing their priorities in this matter. Both seem to be much more interested in furthering their political fortunes than in relieving those who have been neglected far too long.

There are currently over 1,600 Americans who are listed as POWs or Missing in Action (MIA). According to the Forgotten Americans Committee of Nebraska, over 500 of these men have been imprisoned for more than three years; some more than five years.

Only 12 prisoners have ever been released by the North Vietnamese government. Over 20 are known to have died while being held captive.

Aside from the inhuman treatment seen by the POWs who have returned, the most tragic part of this story is that most of the families of the men involved don't know if their sons, husbands, fathers or brothers are alive or dead. The North Vietnamese won't tell them.

And yet the politicians haggle over the method of returning the long-suffering prisoners rather than making a commitment to get them back as soon as is

physically possible. It is high time that the politicians realized that the POW issue should be one that transcends campaigns—one that demands cooperation.

It must be made clear that the foremost commitment of every American should be to return these prisoners from their political purgatory.

To fulfill this commitment, each citizen must make an effort to see that government responds to pleas for help for the POWs. Several agencies have come into existence to aid in this effort.

Two such agencies now exist in Nebraska: the Forgotten Americans Committee, Box 127, Omaha; and VIVA-Omaha, 2507 So. 90 St., Omaha.

At UNL, the Student Veterans' Organization, 345 Nebraska Union, serves much the same function. Any of these sources can aid in obtaining information and instructing students about what they can do to help the POWs.

One solid effort that can be made in that direction is the purchase of a POW bracelet from VIVA-Omaha. Nearly all money donated for the bracelets (\$2.50 for nickel, \$3 for copper) goes for publicity campaigns to boost awareness of the POW cause.

Each bracelet bears the name of a POW or MIA now in Vietnam and indicates the date he was lost. It is worn with the vow that it will not be removed until the day the Red Cross is allowed into North Vietnam and can assure his family of his status and that he receives the humane treatment due all men under the Geneva Convention.

Writing letters to plea for the POWs is another possible method of assistance. Letters may be addressed to the President, and, more effectively, to Nebraska's Representatives and Senators.

But most importantly, each citizen must keep himself informed and involved in the plight of the POWs. Their release should be our utmost concern.

Jim Gray

election year blues



Killing with reserved detachment

michele
coyle
mind
games

Chances are you may have missed the big news issued last week from Saigon. The war does not seem to be too newsworthy these days—there's just not enough action. Nevertheless, the American casualty count for the week ending Sept. 16 set a new precedent.

Aside from the value statement "casualty count" implies (definition: casual, a happening by chance; casualty count, a measure of the success or failure of military action by recording the number of non-living or crippled bodies strewn about the scene of combat), the figures reported are worth more than a little thought.

For the first time since March, 1965, no American was killed in combat. Five Americans, however, did die from non-combat causes, seven were wounded and four were captured or missing. The South Vietnamese reported 409 dead and 1,710 wounded.

They also claimed 4,625 enemy soldiers killed, a healthy increase over the 3,449 reported slain the preceding week. Granted, most of these numbers probably are inflated; nevertheless, at least 7,000 human beings have been killed or wounded in this conflict during the past seven days. Most of these dead seemingly don't count due to the color of their skin.

Americans have been so barraged by numbers, statistics and atrocities that their sensitivity to massive bombing and mining

gradually has decreased to an all-time low. In a certain sense, bombs and mines allow one to kill with reserved detachment. Generally, one is at enough of a distance that it no longer is necessary to stick around and pick up any pieces. An air war is a depersonalized, particularly evil war tactic because it is largely invisible (except, of course, to those who are bombed and mined).

I find it particularly ironic that American forces now openly mine South Vietnamese rivers and canals. It's almost as if the past practice of dropping literally millions of tons of explosives on this tiny country wasn't enough. Our success in defoliating the land and sterilizing the soil can only be outdone by our ability to destroy canals and contaminate water, a gift to generations of Vietnamese to come.

I don't imagine anything particularly new or enlightening can be said about this war in Southeast Asia. Battles are won and lost, cities are overrun and recaptured, more stringent censorship is imposed on the Vietnamese press and people as each month passes. There is talk about winding down and peace with honor, but the killing still continues. Fewer Americans are killed in combat, the battles are raged more in the skies and many American people become less concerned, less vocal, more absorbed in their own little worlds.

As the ground war is discontinued, the air war escalates. And lest you forget, the killing still continues.