

October 14, 1952

471-B
Prisoners of War

MEMORANDUM FOR

HONORABLE ROBERT LOVETT
The Secretary of Defense

x 1285

The attached letter, sent to the President by Senator Case of South Dakota, is self-explanatory. Will you please be good enough to handle as you think advisable.

Thank you.

MATTHEW J. CONNELLY
Secretary to the President

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Encl

let. Oct. 1 to the President from Senator Francis Case of S.D. Custer, S.D. --re prisoners of war in Korea x
Mr. Connelly's pencilled note: "Refer to Secty. of Defense KJC"

- copy attached -



Copy

United States Senate
Committee on Public Works
Custer, South Dakota
October 1, 1952

The Honorable Harry S. Truman
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. President:

I have received a letter from a South Dakota girl whose husband has been a prisoner of war held by the North Koreans since December 2, 1950.

He has received the Silver Star in this war, and the Purple Heart twice, the Bronze Star and five battle stars in the last war.

His wife writes me after having read a recent newspaper article which reports a radio interview in which the following statement was made.

"Right now on Panmunjon we are on a very good propaganda wicket. This idea that we are willing to sacrifice the lives of our own prisoners, if necessary, to protect the freedom and the liberty of Asiatics is the first time that the white man has ever done anything like that. That has had tremendous propaganda effect in Asia. It was a tough decision to make....a very tough one.... but they made it and are sticking to it."

This wife then comments -- "My husband is worth more than 500 Communist prisoners of war."

How long must her husband and thousands more like him stay in the prisoner of war Camps? And hundreds of others be subjected to casualties each week? Do you have any prospect whatsoever of bringing the Korean War to a close and restoring these boys to their families?

What is the comparative number of prisoners held by us as compared with the number of our boys held by them.

Very sincerely yours,

/s/ Francis Case
U. S. Senator, South Dakota

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON

File
OCT 30 1952

Dear Senator Case:

Your letter to the President of the United States, dated 1 October 1952, concerning United States Prisoners of War in Korea has been referred to me for reply.

I can appreciate your interest and the deep concern of anyone who has a relative who is a prisoner of war in Korea. I assure you that this Department and the United Nations are exerting every effort to assure the early release of personnel held by the Communists.

The exchange of prisoners of war, particularly the question of forcible repatriation of some Communist prisoners now being held by the United Nations forces in Korea, is the most difficult problem confronting the United Nations in the Korean armistice negotiations. The decision of the United States Government not to forcibly return Communist prisoners, and to be firm in this decision, is based on fundamental moral principles and on practical military considerations.

As has been reported, numbers of prisoners now held by the United Nations Command have sworn to die rather than to be returned to Communist control, and others have so compromised themselves that there is little doubt but that they would be liquidated en masse if turned over to their former masters. As the President of the United States has said, to agree to forced repatriation "would be repugnant to the fundamental moral and humanitarian principles which underlie our action in Korea. To return these prisoners of war in our hands by force would result in misery and bloodshed to the eternal dishonor of the United States and the United Nations. We will not buy an armistice by turning over human beings for slaughter or slavery."

Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the hope of refuge and asylum from Communist tyranny is an important cause of defection and surrender by soldiers of the Communist states. If enemy soldiers who laid down their arms in hope of refuge from Communism were returned ruthlessly for punishment by their former masters, the fact would be exploited fully by the Communists to deter surrender by their troops in the future. This would be a military factor of considerable importance to any resumption of hostilities. While obviously the first duty of the United States is to our own soldiers, we must consider both those now in the hands of the Communists and those who may be called upon to serve their country in any future hostilities.

I assure you that the United States Government's decision in this matter was reached only after the most serious evaluation of all aspects of the problem. The Department of Defense is convinced that this decision was a wise one and will best serve the objective of the United States in combating Communist aggression throughout the world.

Our stand on the prisoner of war question undoubtedly taxes the patience and forbearance of those whose loved ones are in Communist hands. Yet, an objective appraisal of over-all national interest leaves us no useful alternative than to follow the policy of no forced repatriation.

With reference to your specific question concerning the number of prisoners held by each side, the United Nations presently holds 111,849 North Koreans and 20,891 Chinese Communist prisoners. While in December 1951 the Communists claimed that they held 3,198 United States prisoners, United Nations Command accepts 1,748 as U.S. captured and carries 9,438 U.S. as missing in action.

Sincerely yours,

ROBERT A. LOVETT

Honorable Francis Case

United States Senate

cc: Secretary to the President

