

Peking story (American prisoners in China) - correspondence, letters and ca...

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Dag Hammarskjöld's saml.

Peking story - 1955

21 Jan.

- Lane, Thomas J. (Congress of the United States, Washington, D.C.)
 - 1 letter to D.H.
 - D.H.'s reply, 27 Jan.

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D. C.

January 21, 1955

Honorable Dag Hammarskjold
Secretary General of the United Nations
U. N. Headquarters
New York, New York

Dear Sir:

We are aware of the difficulties you experienced on your mission to Red China in an effort to effect the release of eleven imprisoned American airmen.

As you no doubt know, American public opinion is also concerned about the fate of two civilians; Richard G. Fecteau of Lynn, Massachusetts, and John T. Downey of New Britain, Connecticut, as well as all others illegally held by the Communist regime at Peiping.

If it is possible, we would like you to give us some assurances that representations were made by you to secure the liberation of these Americans and all other nationals who are held in custody on 'trumped-up' charges.

It is a crime against humanity to imprison innocent men.

The success or failure of the United Nations on this issue affects the integrity of the U.N. itself.

We believe that there should be no 'deals'...and no ransom.

These men should be freed for the simple and uncomplicated reason that...they are innocent.

On the facts...and in the name of justice.

If...God forbid...the U.N. should gloss over this moral imperative if it should compromise with the lives of these men...and fail to assert that they must be released because they are guiltless...then the U.N. itself would become but the instrument of shallow and cynical expediency.

Page two

January 21, 1955

We are not unmindful of the heavy responsibility that has been placed in your hands.

In the name of all that is humane and honorable, we ask for a public declaration that the rights of Fecteau and Downey...as well as all others who are held as hostages...will not be ignored by the U.N. in its negotiations with the Communist dictators of Red China.

Trusting that you may give us this forthright promise, I am

Sincerely yours,

Thomas G. Lane

27 January 1955

Dear Sir,

I am in receipt of your letter of 21 January regarding the fate of two United States civilians; Richard G. Fecteau of Lynn, Massachusetts and John T. Downey of New Britain, Connecticut.

You may note from the press conference of Mr. Dulles, Secretary of State, which took place on 18 January 1955, that the cases of Mr. Downey and Mr. Fecteau did not come under my terms of reference. The relevant extracts from Mr. Dulles' press conference are the following:

" Asked whether independent efforts would be made to obtain the release of the two civilians who received prisoner sentences at the same time as the fliers since they did not come under the purview of the Hammarskjold mission, the Secretary replied:

" Yes, we are very much concerned about them and with the very considerable number of civilians that are improperly detained by the Chinese communists. There is quite a large group of them, forty or fifty or thereabouts. We did get a few of them out and we intend to continue to try to get them all out."

" Q. Is there any light you can throw for us on the status of the two civilians who the President said were in a different category than the fliers?

" A. All I can say is that they were civilians. They were not under the United Nations Command and therefore they are not within the compass of the United Nations action.

" Q. In other words, do we know how they got into Chinese hands?

" A. My recollection is that they were on a plane that was shot down, but I am not certain about that.

" Q. Mr. Secretary, since they are not under the jurisdiction of the United Nations and not involved in Hammarskjold's discussions, will we independently and individually try to do something to save them?

" A. Yes, we are very much concerned about them and with the very considerable number of civilians that are improperly detained by the Chinese Communists. There is quite a large group of them, forty or fifty or thereabouts. We did get a few of them out and we intend to continue to try to get them all out."

/...

In the light of this situation I would suggest that you contact the Department of State regarding the cases of these men.

I think it would interest you to know, however, that although the cases of the two men did not come under my purview, the discussions in Peking developed in such a way as to enable me to protect their interests.

Very sincerely yours,

Dag Hammarskjold,
Secretary-General

The Honorable Thomas J. Lane,
House of Representatives,
Washington, D.C.

AWC:dg