

MIAs daughter tries to aid POWs

By JILL GERBER
State and National Editor

Robin Owen Bell of Carrboro has not seen her father in 18 years, but the pair's separation has been far from voluntary. Green Beret Sgt. 1st Class Robert D. Owen and another Green Beret disappeared May 23, 1968, while on a reconnaissance mission in Laos during the Vietnam War. Bell was 7 years old when she last saw her father, who was stationed in Okinawa, Japan. Bell said in an interview at her home that she does not expect to see her father again. Since the United States was not at war with Laos, American soldiers left there would be considered war criminals, not prisoners of war. To date, no soldier has returned from the nation, and the Laotians say they are not holding any Americans captive, she said. Bell has taken up the cause of locating the estimated 63 to 200 Americans believed held in Southeast Asia. She said she was disturbed by the lack of

government effort toward the issue and the scarce amount of information available to families of POWs and soldiers classified "missing in action." "I was quiet for so long that I really didn't have any hope," she said. "I have the time and energy now to say something." Three weeks ago, Bell attended Senate hearings on the issue, which has received attention recently from two former Green Berets who are suing the federal government over their report that 100 to 200 Americans remain in Southeast Asia prisons. The government said it is investigating all claims but has no knowledge of existing POWs. Bell said she was dissatisfied with President Reagan's handling of the POW problem and the outcome of the hearings, which were not attended by people who had information but could not afford to fly to Washington. "Reagan said this was a top national

priority, but all... (the officials at the hearings) did was pat each other on the back," she said. The government has tried to placate veterans and POW family members with statistics that mean little to those grieving over a lost friend or relative, she said. For example, 20 percent of all soldiers after World War II were unaccounted for, but 5.5 percent of soldiers after the Vietnam conflict were missing, according to the Pentagon. The thought of POWs left in Asia was an embarrassment to four presidential administrations, and for a long time, Americans accepted the government's reluctance to face the issue, Bell said. "We wanted to believe that the government had taken care of... (the POWs)," she said. "The country is more patriotic today. I don't think we're afraid of embarrassing politicians." Bell said the wives and mothers of American soldiers lost in Vietnam have begun new lives, but the sons and daughters, fed up with what they see as the government's oversight, have taken up the issue. "My mother is supportive but doesn't believe my father is still alive," she said. "The sons and daughters realized that something was wrong and are carrying on (the effort)." In her pursuit of news about her father and other missing Americans, Bell has met with key figures in the Vietnam conflict. She always carries a picture of her father in the hope that someone will remember him. "It's interesting to me that everyone

I talked to agrees that there are POWs (in Southeast Asia)," she said. One individual who spent time there is Robert Garwood, a POW who returned to the United States in 1979, three months after President Jimmy Carter's administration declared there were no longer any POWs in Asia. Upon his return, Garwood was charged with desertion and collaborating with the enemy. His information about POWs was not considered by the government and Bell said she believed he was treated unfairly. "What if 63 to 200 Americans came back?" she asked. "Would they be charged with desertion? Would these deserters be allowed to talk and if so, would Garwood's case be reversed? Are these persons deserters or has our government deserted them?" Bell said she wanted to speak to the media about POWs because of its influence on public opinion. She compared the prisoner situation to the hostage crisis of 1979, when 54 Americans were held for 444 days by Iranian students in the American embassy in Tehran. In the hostage situation, the government was pressured into action by the large amount of media coverage, but the POWs have received relatively little attention, she said. Bell wears a silver bracelet engraved with her father's name, status, and the date he was missing. She said she will not take it off until the issue is settled. "I am convinced that there are other live Americans (being held in Southeast Asia)," she said. "My feeling is, let us go check the jungles."

French Socialists predicted to lose majority in parliament

From Associated Press reports

PARIS — French voters gave the main conservative opposition party a slim majority of National Assembly seats in Sunday's election, early computer projections indicated. The Socialists, who have controlled the assembly for five years, will still be the largest single party but will not have enough seats to form a government, according to the projections. For an absolute majority, a party must win at least 289 seats in the new 577-seat assembly. The Socialists were shown winning between 210 and 215 seats. Socialist President Francois Mitterrand has said that if the opposition wins he will name a premier from its ranks. If that happens, it would be the first time since the Fifth Republic was established in 1958 that a president would be forced to try to govern with an opposition parliament and premier.

Two rescued from hotel rubble

SINGAPORE — Two men entombed for 36 hours under a collapsed six-story hotel were rescued Sunday night and workers labored nonstop, tunneling toward more people still alive in the ruins. The two rescued survivors were among 11 or more people who called for help from under the rubble a day after the 67-room Hotel New World collapsed Saturday, according to the state-owned Singapore Broadcasting Corp. The confirmed death toll rose to seven as five bodies were recovered Sunday. In addition, 61 people were missing.

OPEC talks stall

GENEVA — OPEC oil ministers emerged with no word of progress Sunday after four hours of emergency talks on strategies to halt the steepest oil price decline in history. Arturo Hernandez Grisanti, president of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, and Venezuela's oil minister, said partic-

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ipants at the Sunday meeting voiced their general positions but did not discuss the main issues.

World oil prices have plummeted from nearly \$30 a barrel in December to about \$15 in March.

Rebels demand autonomy

MANILA, Philippines — A leader of Moslems who have waged a 14-year separatist war said Sunday that rebels will not lay down their weapons until President Corazon Aquino grants autonomy to the southern island of Mindanao.

Macapanton Abbas, political officer of the Moro National Liberation Front, urged Aquino to grant self-rule to Mindanao under a plan accepted in 1976 by ousted President Ferdinand E. Marcos. The rebellion has killed 60,000 people.

Macos failed to fully enact the Tripoli Agreement that would create executive, legislative, and judicial councils to control the budget and security forces of the island's 13 provinces, Abbas said.

Kidnapped Americans honored

WASHINGTON — Hundreds of people attended a church service Sunday in honor of six Americans kidnapped in Lebanon who were described by the Rev. Jesse Jackson as "victims of a faceless war."

The 90-minute service marked the second year in captivity for William Buckley, and the first for Terry Anderson, Buckley, the political officer at the U.S. Embassy, and Anderson, the chief Middle East correspondent for the Associated Press, were both kidnapped on the Beirut streets.

They and four others were abducted by a shadowy Moslem Shiite group known as Islamic Jihad. The group claimed last October it had executed Buckley, but U.S. officials have not confirmed that.

Reagan lobbies for congressional support of Contra aid package

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Reagan, seeking public pressure on Congress to approve \$100 million aid for Nicaraguan rebels, declared Sunday evening that the funds are needed to "deny the Soviet Union a beachhead in North America." In prepared remarks four days before the House votes on the proposal, Reagan urged his countrymen not to ignore "the malignancy in Managua until it spreads and becomes a mortal threat to the entire New World." Sen. James Sasser, leading the Democratic response to Reagan's speech, agreed with much of the president's view, but said it was time

for negotiation not military buildup. Sasser has proposed compromise legislation that would give the Sandinistas time to talk.

Reagan made his case for \$70 million in military aid and \$30 million in non-lethal funds for the so-called Contra forces. "We are asking only to be permitted to switch a small part of our present defense budget — to the defense of our own southern frontier," he said.

A senior administration official, briefing reporters at the White House on the president's speech but insisting he not be identified, said Reagan was about 10 to 12 votes short of victory in the House and would lobby members in search of support.

The official said the administration remains unwilling to compromise on the amount of money Reagan requested or by placing new restrictions on how the money is spent. But he acknowledged "the possibility of the president agreeing unilaterally to allow some time between the enactment of the legislation and the actual delivery of military assistance" to encourage peace talks with the Sandinistas.

Reagan portrayed a dire situation in Central America should the Contra forces lose American assistance.

"Using Nicaragua as a base, the Soviets and Cubans can become the dominant power in the crucial corridor between North and South America. Established there, they will be in a position to threaten the Panama Canal, interdict our vital Caribbean sea lanes, and, ultimately, move against Mexico."

"Should that happen, desperate Latin peoples by the millions would begin fleeing north into the cities of the southern United States, or to wherever some hope of freedom remained."

The president charged members of the ruling Sandinista regime with selling illegal drugs to Americans, using their country as a terrorist command post and threatening the security of the Western alliance by seeking to spread revolution through Central America to the Panama Canal.

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