

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Christian and Missionary Alliance, an evangelical church denomination with headquarters in Nyack, New York, confirmed today that its five missionaries released by Hanoi on October 30 had suffered intensely while detained for eight months in Viet Nam. The harsh weather of the rainy season combined with the stark conditions following military conflict in Pleiku Province to bring them close to death.

The missionaries--Mrs. Betty Mitchell, Rev. & Mrs. Norman Johnson and Dr. and Mrs. Richard Phillips as well as Mr. & Mrs. John Miller of the Wycliffe Bible Translators--had been at the Alliance medical center in Banmethuot, South Viet Nam in mid-March 1975 when military forces moving into that area seized the town and led the missionaries into captivity.

Until May 31 they experienced primitive and bare survival conditions as they were moved from one camp to another in Pleiku Province. At no time were they willfully mistreated, physically punished or tortured. But they shared with their captors and with other prisoners, South Vietnamese military officers, the hazardous conditions in this war devastated area and under almost uninterrupted tropical rains.

Malaria, respiratory illnesses, malnutrition, the irritation of insects, the ever encroaching jungle, and poor shelter from the weather turned their captivity into a fight for survival which Rev. Mr. Johnson and Mrs. Phillips almost lost.

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Some of the South Vietnamese officers did not make it.

On May 31 they were taken to Thanh Binh near Pleiku where they remained till August 15. Conditions improved considerably at this more permanent camp. On August 15 ^{they} the missionaries were taken by truck first to Quinhon and then to Son Tay near Hanoi. For the next nine weeks they were under a kind of "house arrest." Here they were provided good Vietnamese meals. The North Vietnamese officer in charge of them spoke good English and was affable and kind.

Suddenly on October 28 they were informed that they would be released on October 30 and flown to Bangkok. On departure day a farewell meal was served by the camp officials, speeches were made, and gifts were given to them.

Dr. Nathan Bailey, President of the Alliance, returned this week from Bangkok where he welcomed the missionaries. He reports that Dr. & Mrs. Phillips and Rev. & Mrs. Johnson have already been reunited with their families in California and in Ontario, Canada respectively. Mrs. Mitchell is on her way to Malaysia to stay for one month with her daughter, Geraldine, at a CMA school in Penang. Mrs. Mitchell had experienced a brief recurrence of malaria in Bangkok, but she and the other missionaries are all well, said Dr. Bailey.

Information is still being sought on three other missionaries taken captive in May, 1962 when a party of Viet Cong raided the Alliance medical center at Banmethuot-- Rev. Archie Mitchell, the hospital administrator and Mrs. Mitchell's husband; Dr. Ardel Vietti, a medical missionary; and Mr. Dan Gerber, a Mennonite Paxman. Officials of the Alliance will continue to seek information concerning these missionaries.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance has been active in humanitarian and missionary work throughout Viet Nam since 1911. A worldwide missionary society and evangelical church denomination, it was founded in 1887 and today has a church constituency of over one million in the United States, Canada and 41 other countries. In 1975 the Alliance has more than 900 missionaries assigned in these 43 countries.