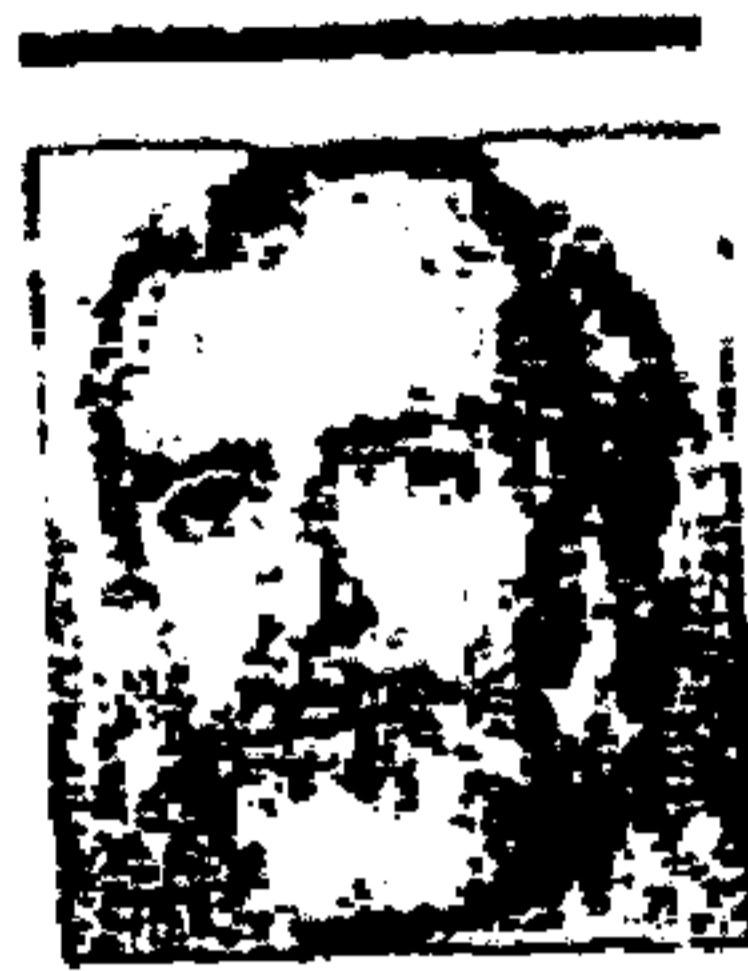


# The Footnote Kissinger Wants Expunged

AS WE AWAIT the release of the still being-fought-over report of the Senate Select committee on POW/MIA Affairs, it is bizarre, to say the least, to observe the machinations of some of those trying to censor and tailor its language. High on the list of those rewriters of history and protectors of their personal eternal flames are Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger.

Let's start with Nixon, who has stonewalled this Senate panel as brazenly as he tried to stonewall Congress nearly 20 years ago over his Watergate tapes. He was unsuccessful in 1974. This time, he has gotten away with it — because neither the committee nor, more importantly, the press has screamed bloody murder.

Nixon, you may remember, was the one who told the nation, after the peace accords with Vietnam had been signed in January, 1973, that all the American POWs had been released by Hanoi, which now turns out not to have been true. Nixon by then was on his way to becoming a cornered man, with the beast of Watergate advancing on him in the Oval Office. He wanted desperately to be rid of Vietnam so he could concentrate on self-preservation. So he said there weren't any men left behind. No one in the ex-



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ecutive branch chose to contradict the boss.

The Defense Department was a key part of this yes-team. On April 11, 1973, Nixon held a meeting in his office with Roger Shields, the Pentagon official then dealing with the POW issue. Brent Scowcroft, then deputy national security adviser, was also present. Not long after that discussion, Shields announced that there was no credible evidence that any live POWs remained in Vietnamese hands. However, at hearings last year before the Senate POW panel, three former defense secretaries testified that the opposite was true — men had been abandoned.

There is a tape of the April 11, 1973, meeting, recorded on the same voice-activated system that produced the Watergate tapes. Nixon has refused to release the full recording. Is he beyond the law again? Who pardoned him this time?

Furthermore, Nixon also refused to appear before the committee. Instead, he sent answers to a list of questions, choosing not to face any hostile examination. In these responses, which go beyond even Washington's allowable standards for self-serving pap, Nixon denies pressuring Shields in that 1973 meeting and calls such a suggestion "insulting." All right, Mr. Nixon, since you've got nothing to hide, let's hear the tape.

And now for Henry Kissinger, who, though he did consent to testify before the committee, has actually outdone Nixon in the realm of foolishness, meddling and paranoia. The former national security adviser, who negotiated the Paris peace ac-

ords, was not satisfied simply to put his version of history into the committee's record. He now wants to alter its final report.

Working through Sen. Hank Brown of Colorado (a Republican committee member who is possibly acting under the influence of an old Kissinger ally, Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole), Kissinger has been lobbying fiercely to delete and/or change certain passages in the report that refer to his role on the prisoner issue. Sources report that Brown has been carrying Kissinger's water in the meetings now being held to hammer out final language.

To digress a moment, how did Kissinger, a subject of the committee's investigation, obtain a draft copy of its report? The speculation is that it was leaked to him either by Brown or Sen. John McCain, another member of the committee who wants the Nixon-Kissinger no-men-were-left-behind view to prevail.

A key passage in the draft report that Kissinger is trying to have expunged involves what Kissinger had been told by intelligence officials in 1973 about remaining POWs and how Nixon had failed to act on it. The passage, a long footnote, says that 10 days ago, in a phone conversation with Sen. Bob Smith, the committee vice chairman, Kissinger disclosed that he had told Nixon that the intelligence community had concluded that Hanoi's list of POWs held in Laos was incomplete. Kissinger, according to the footnote, said that when he informed Nixon of this, the president declared that "a failure to account for the additional prisoners . . . would lead to a resumption of [U.S.] bombing." The footnote concludes: "Dr. Kissinger said that the president was later unwilling to carry through on this threat."

When a report about this footnote appeared in a *Newsday* story by Knut Royce earlier this week, Kissinger and his lawyers, though they had enjoyed the blessing of the first leak, became incensed about this one, and intensified their expunging efforts through Brown and his staff.

One final story about Sen. Brown. Recently, he asked the Defense Department to compile a list of those of the 591 returned POWs who could be regarded as bona fide "heroes." He said he wanted the list to be added to the committee's report. He had one other request, he said: the Pentagon should make sure the hero list included Sen. McCain, a former POW.

The list has been compiled. Sen. McCain is on it. Unless it is removed between now and next week, it will be in the report. Sen. Brown refused to return my call seeking comment.

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