

Anti-War Veteran Accused of Exploiting P.O.W. Issue



The New York Times

John F. Kerry of Vietnam Veterans Against the War speaking at news conference. With him are Sheila Cronin, left, and Delia Alvarez, members of families of war prisoners.

WASHINGTON, July 22 (AP)—A number of wives of American prisoners of war lashed out today at John F. Kerry, the peace-group leader, accusing him of using the prisoner issue as a springboard to political office.

When Mr. Kerry, a spokesman for the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, attempted to introduce relatives of war prisoners at a news conference, four women shouted, "That's a lie," and "What office are you going to run for next?"

"This is a humane issue and should remain so," cried

Mrs. Patricia Hardy of Los Angeles.

One of the women accused Mr. Kerry of "constantly using our own suffering and grief" for his political ambitions.

At the opening of the news conference, Mr. Kerry called on President Nixon to publicly set a date for withdrawal of all American troops from Vietnam so that prisoners of war could come home.

He said Mr. Nixon earlier refused to set a withdrawal date because of North Vietnam's refusal to guarantee the return of American prisoners. But the latest Vietcong peace offer in Paris, which promises the release of prisoners as American troops are withdrawn, is being ignored by Mr. Nixon, Mr. Kerry charged.

Mr. Kerry, who is 27 years old, introduced wives, parents and sisters of prisoners to plead for support.

One parent, Richard Sigler of Lakewood, Colo., said the Administration told them July 3 in a private briefing not to make any public statements because they might upset secret negotiations. "They never say how or what they're doing," Mr. Sigler said. "They simply say you shouldn't upset the balance."

Mr. Kerry, when asked if he planned to run again for political office, said only that he was committed to political change and that he would use whatever forum seemed best at the time. He was a candidate in the 1970 Democratic Congressional primary in Massachusetts but withdrew in favor of another candidate.