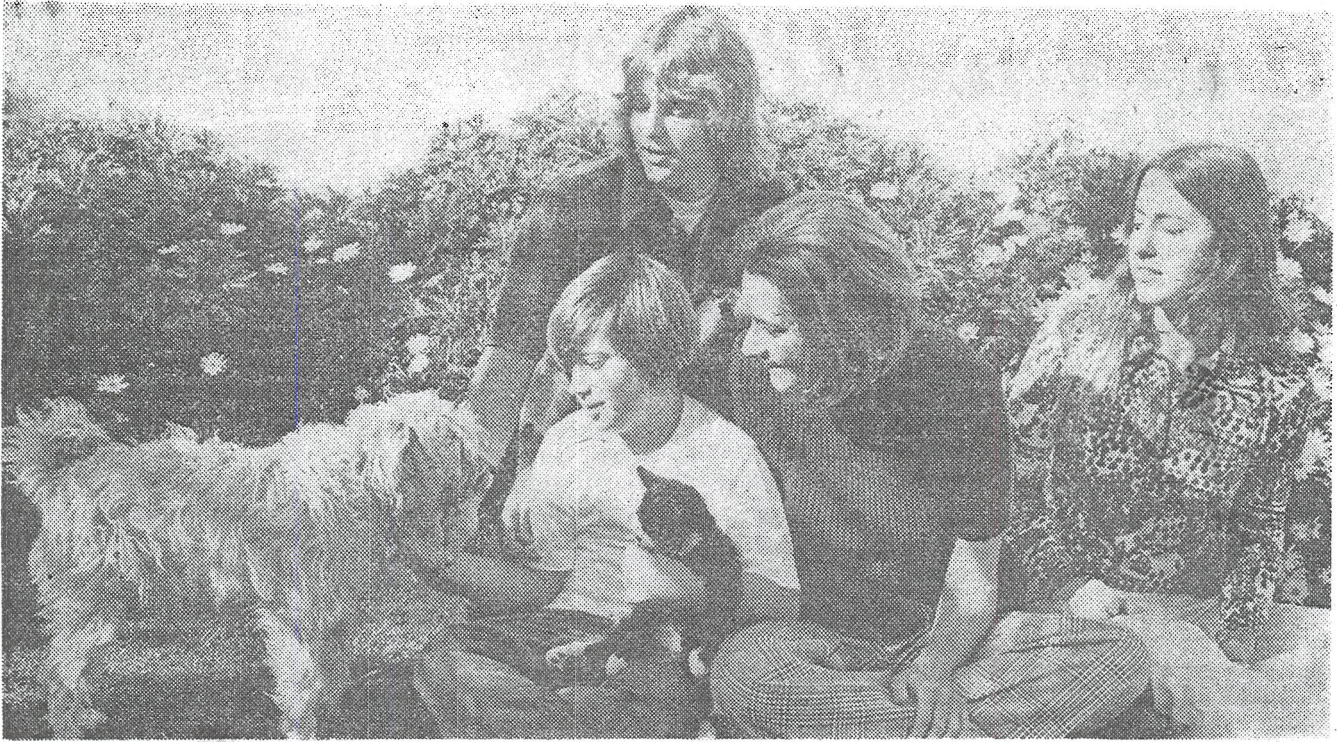


Viet MIA group flickers out



Mrs. Lou Page has immersed herself in her family; Chip, Jeff and Julie

—Examiner photos by Seymour Snaer

By Don West
Examiner Staff

SAN JOSE — Dwindling hope, lack of funds and public apathy have written the end of the Santa Clara County chapter of the POW-MIA League.

When Mrs. Lou Page yesterday completed dedication of a "freedom tree" in honor of her husband, Lt. Col. Gordon Page, formal ceremonies ended for the three-year-old organization.

"We're out of money and running out of volunteers," said Mrs. Cara Villafore, chapter chairman and a volunteer whose Navy husband lost a lot of friends in the Vietnam War.

"As for myself, I just decided to face the fact that been limited by her fierce advocacy of the POW-MIA problem, she says, so she plans a return to college for a master's degree in journalism.

While most wives are

"starting all over," none has come to grips with a legal step that would wipe out their last hope. A group of sisters and mothers has brought suit to force the federal government to declare those missing in action as being officially dead, a step few of the wives want so long as so many questions are unanswered about their men's fate.

There really is not any hope left," said Mrs. Page, whose husband disappeared on a reconnaissance mission nearly eight years ago.

Facing that stark reality has been complicated by rumors emerging periodically from Southeast Asia that some men may still be alive. A team investigating graves has been thwarted by warfare still raging in the jungles there, retaining the tantalizing uncertainty.

Adjusting to the inevitable for the women has taken many forms — volunteer work, regular jobs and immersion in rearing their children.

Mrs. Page tried work for a

time, but she has now dedicated all her time to Jeff, 18, who is about to graduate from Willow Glen High; Julie, 15½, and Chipper, 7. Chipper was born after his father disappeared.

Mrs. Harding Smith, whose husband also disappeared on a 1966 mission, has reared her children, but finds it difficult to "commit myself to a job yet."

She intends to keep working through the national organization, admitting it would be "a miracle if he came back now, but it's a miracle I'd be ready to accept."

Her job opportunities have
(No contact with...)