

Some Date, Others

By Frances Moffat and Grace Eaves Prien

THERE was a lot of talk about husbands and children but it wasn't the usual ladies' lunch small talk. Six wives of men missing in action in the Indochina War were telling what it's like backstage in a long-playing tragic drama that is unparalleled in United States military history.

"I don't feel my husband is alive, I never have," says blonde Mrs. Paul Charvet, 29, at the luncheon in the patio of the Hillsborough home of Mrs. John S. Logan.

Chris Charvet's husband, a Navy lieutenant commander, was lost on the final mission of his third tour of duty. He has been missing for five and a half years. So has the husband of Mrs. Gordon Page. But Lou Page, 39, with short dark hair flecked with gray, still has hope:

"I don't think of him as dead."

Lou, who lives in San Jose, doubles as mother and father for her three sons, 15, 13 and 5, taking them on camping trips and to baseball games. Air Force Major Page has never seen his youngest son, Chipper, who likes to say:

"My Daddy doesn't know me, but when he comes home he'll say, 'Who are you?' Then I'll tell him I'm Chipper and he'll know."

Of the other four wives, two feel their husbands are dead, the other two cling to hope. Several threads ran through their sometimes heart-breaking stories:

- It's important for Americans to remember that 1649 men are missing and imprisoned, even though President Nixon said in the opening words of his economic speech last month that we are achieving the goal of ending the war.

- **The POWs (Prisoners of War) and MIAs (Missing in Action) should not be made a political issue, but public opinion could force North Vietnam to adhere to the Geneva Conventions (which it signed along with some 120 other nations) and**

list the POWs. So far, not one of the 1649 has been officially identified.

- In previous wars prisoners were identified through international channels. In Indochina, the vast majority are MIAs.

- **The wife of an MIA is in limbo. Until the war or the stalemate at Paris ends, she must wait to learn whether she is still a wife — or a widow.**

Mrs. Logan, who is a director of the Golden Gate Chapter of the American Red Cross, became interested in the plight of POW and MIA families last year at a Red Cross convention. She met the wives through Friends of POW/MIA League in Santa Clara county.

"The longer the war goes on," says Lib Logan, "the grimmer it gets. I believe in supporting the boys who are doing what their country asked."

Mrs. Logan's luncheon went off on schedule although she was in the hospital with a broken ankle. Her daughter, Mrs. Christian Meyer, took her place.

The wives were dry-eyed at the luncheon but tears were not far below the surface for their listeners. They heard Mrs. Gordon Hill, whose husband's F-4 Phantom jet was shot down 15 months ago over the Plain of Jars in Laos, tell about her physically handicapped son, Brian, 3½.

Brian can't walk and has to be carried to a Peninsula nursery school for children with cerebral palsy.

About Julie Hill's husband, an Air Force captain, whom she married when she was a sophomore and he a junior at New Mexico State University, she asserts, "I think we (the American forces) should go in and get him."

Julie lives in Santa Clara county, but prefers not to publicize her home city.

"I get sick calls," she explains. "Like the man who called and asked if I'd bought my husband's cemetery plot."

Although less outspoken than Julie, the activists in the group at the lunch are Lou Page and Mrs. Joseph C. Bors, wife of an Air Force major whose plane was lost three and half years ago over South Vietnam.

Lou and Sondra Bors were on a charter flight to Europe last May for 175 members of the National League of Families, an organization of POW and MIA relatives.

Wait

"We visited 11 different cities, trying to make people aware that the Geneva Conventions were not being adhered to," says Sondra.

Sondra, who is 33, and her 11-year-old twins, Joe and Anne, live in a home in MountainView, where her husband got them settled two weeks before he left for Vietnam.

"He's a fantastically strong person," says the attractive brunette. "I'm sure he's all right."

Taking jobs and going back to college fill in lonely days for the wives. Red-haired Mrs. James Beene, who drove over from Alameda with Chris Charvet, is going to Cal State in Hayward, taking studies toward a teaching credential.

Pat Beene, who is 31, wears a VIVA (Voices in Vital America) bracelet encribed with the name of her husband and the date, October 5, 1966, when his plane was lost at sea on a return flight from North Vietnam.

Pat Beene says she has to be realistic about the fate of her husband, a lieutenant commander in the Navy.

"I think he is dead. They never found any evidence in the water."

Pat has a daughter, Katy, who is 4½. About a year ago she started dating.

"I enjoy a man's companionship," she says. Marriage, of course, is out of the question. The limbo in which the MIA's wife lives could extend well beyond the statute of limitations for civilians that declares a person dead if missing for seven years.

As long as their husbands are officially missing, the wives receive their pay and allowances. All six at the lunch felt their present needs are amply provided for but, looking into the future, some feel they couldn't make it on a widow's pension.

One of them, 39-year-old Mrs. Ernest De Soto of Daly City, has taken a part-time job as a dental assistant "to keep my sanity by having people around me."

The black-eyed brunette has no hope that her husband, an Air Force lieutenant colonel, survived

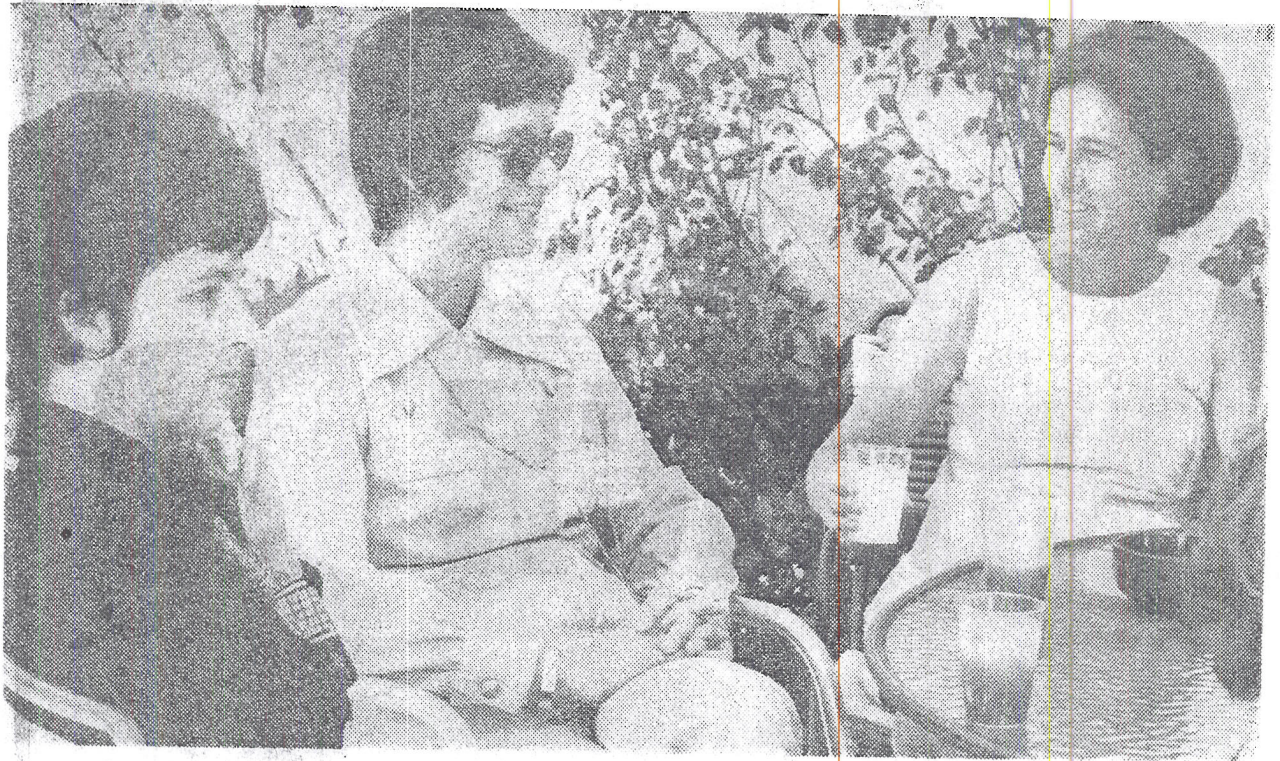
when his plane was shot down over South Vietnam on April 12, 1969.

"I want to be prepared when they come to give me the final word," says Joyce De Soto.

She has been dating recently, especially when invitations to go sailing or to ball games include her children. She has two sons, 10 and 13, and a 4-year-old daughter.

Outsiders can try to cheer the families of POWs and MIAs and help with their cause, but their greatest support comes from each other. That's why an organization to get them acquainted is important.

"But," sighs Joyce, "it's a group that nobody wants to belong to."



Women's World

Hostess Mrs. Christian Meyer (above, at right) discussed appeal abroad on behalf of missing men with Mmes. Joseph Bors, Gordon Page; while (at right) Mmes. R. Ray Winters (back to camera), Kenneth Monteagle, Anthony R. White and Gordon Hill talked about prisoners of war





Joyce De Soto holds no hope for her husband, Lieutenant Colonel Ernest De Soto USAF, shown below in photo taken at Christmas time before he was shot down in April, 1969



Missing in action in Vietnam: (clockwise from right) Major Joseph C. Bors USAF, Captain Gordon C. Hill USAF, Major Gordon Page USAF

