

## Splinter Group

# POW Wives Speak Out

By Virginia Westover

*"Don't you want to press for international inspection of prison camps?"*

*"No, we want to empty them."*

*—Network advertisement  
POW/MIA Families for Immediate Release*

**CONVINCED** that "We are no closer to getting the POWs out than we were three years ago," the more activist families of prisoners of war are rebelling.

Attracting members away from the National League of Families of Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia is a new group, POW-MIA Families for Immediate Release.

"We want to be political," Alice Cronin declared. "And we want to negotiate now while there is something to bargain with," she said. (Her husband, Michael, a lieutenant commander in the Navy, has been a POW for six years.)

She was seated in the living room of the small



MRS. EVERETT ALVAREZ  
"Something more has to be done"

contemporary home in the Oakland hills of Mrs. William (Barbara) Mullen, the group's coordinator.

Last May, the splinter group broke from the National League of Families, which claims 2200 members and has the unofficial blessing of the U.S. government. The league has been concerned primarily with better treatment of POWs and inspection of camps.

"The league says we're anti-POW," Mrs. Mullen said. "That's not true. We'd like to see this government say, 'we'll give you a withdrawal date.'"

(In July at the Paris Peace Talks, the North Vietnamese Communists offered to release all war prisoners they hold by the end of 1971 in exchange for total American military withdrawal by the same date.)

Mrs. Mullen's husband, William, a Marine major, went down over Laos almost six years ago. "Nixon has said if we withdraw, Thieu will not last. Well, Nixon is unpatriotic . . . he puts the survival of Thieu over my husband's."

Among the members of Bay Area families who have switched their support to the new group is Mrs. Everett Alvarez of Santa Clara. Her son, Lieutenant Everett Alvarez Jr. USN, has been in a North Vietnamese prison longer than any American serviceman has been held captive in any American war. He has been a POW since August 5, 1964.

"I came to the conclusion that something more had to be done," she said.

"I'm ready and willing to do anything to bring him home," she said. "I demonstrated in Washington in December. I've never in my life done this before, but I am willing to do more."

Mrs. Libby Beyer Schoemehl, also from the Peninsula, has also joined the Families for Immediate Release. Her brother, Captain Thomas Beyer USAF, was declared missing over South Vietnam three and one-half years ago.

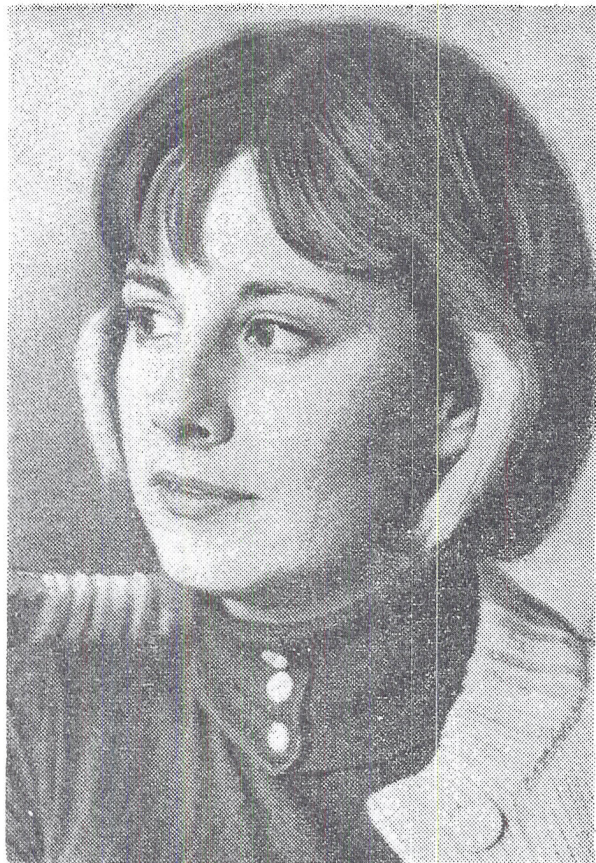
"I haven't been too active until now," the somewhat shy kindergarten teacher said, "But now I must speak up."

She recalled hearing a representative of the league speak at a banquet, asking those present to write to the countries who had signed the Geneva Convention.

"I said to myself, 'this can't be all we can do.'"

She criticized the league for saying they are





MRS. MICHAEL CRONIN  
"We want to be political"

non-political. "They criticize everyone who is opposed to Nixon. Is that non-political?"

Mrs. James Evans, western regional coordinator of the National League of Families, commented on the new group:

"They think they're doing the right thing, and we think we are. It's their privilege to think the way they want."

Maerose Evans, whose husband has been missing for six years, nine months, added that "they (the Families for Immediate Release) are playing right in to the hands of the North Vietnamese government. The enemy hears about something like this and feels it has nothing to lose."

She pointed out that at the September meeting of the league, "We overwhelmingly defeated a vote to go political."

On the other hand, in their campaign to act now to end the war and bring the POWs home, Families for Immediate Release has lobbied on Capitol Hill and begun an advertising program.

Mrs. Mitch Jones, who is now living on the Peninsula, organized lobbying last May when the Hatfield-McGovern bill was up for vote.

In December, 1969, she and Mrs. James Hughes went on a mission to Laos (where her husband is MIA), which was sponsored by Texas millionaire H. Ross Perot.

Families for Immediate Release hopes to open a Washington headquarters, attempt to reach can-



MRS. WILLIAM MULLEN  
"Nixon is unpatriotic"

didates and to have representatives at all the primaries. A newsletter is planned, and Mrs. Cronin is pulling together a network television and radio interview.

"I returned President Nixon's Christmas card just a couple of days ago," Alice Cronin said. I wrote that I would have returned it sooner, but I was too busy working for the POWs."