

The Major's Pay Checks

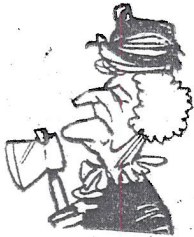
The Air Force vs. Mrs. Dudley

By Mary McGrory
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Washington

MRS. JANE DUDLEY, mother of an American prisoner of war who has been in captivity for seven years, suspects that the Air Force is punishing her for her anti-war activities.

Her son, George McKnight, 37, now a major, designated her to be the recipient of his monthly paychecks before he was shot down over North Vietnam on November 6, 1965. She received the money regularly until June, 1971, when the Air Force suddenly informed her that, starting the following August 1, it would be deposited in a military savings program.



The letter from Air Force Headquarters in Colorado, signed by Colonel H. Bruce Frederics, told her that "our review of Major McKnight's file provides no evidence that your son's Air Force income is being managed in his best interests." Therefore, Frederics concluded, it would be put in the Uniformed Services Savings Deposit Program.

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MRS. DUDLEY REPLIED with an accounting of her stewardship, citing deposits in four savings and loan companies at 6 per cent interest and investment in a condominium in Honolulu, where the Alaska-born Mrs. Dudley lived until six months ago when she came to Washington. She asked that the money continue to be sent to her.

In a reply dated August 31, 1971, Frederics complimented Mrs. Dudley on her handling of her son's money. "You have done a commendable job of both investments and savings," he wrote. But, he added, since the 10 per cent annual interest rate of U.S.S.D.P. was higher than the 6 per cent of the savings and loan companies, the Air Force would take charge of the money.

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MRS. DUDLEY AGAIN PROTESTED, and in a reply of December 7, Frederics had shifted his ground. He could not honor her request that all past and future payments be made to her, he wrote, because "the Air Force has established a policy which requires that the pay of MIA-POWs (missing in action-prisoners of war) without dependents be placed in U.S.S.D.P."

Mrs. Dudley thinks it is because she has made "no secret" of the way she feels about the war and has protested from the beginning. "I can't prove anything, and they'll say it's for another reason. But why else after all these years?"

A slender, gentle, grey-haired, rather vague woman, Mrs. Dudley has decided to take action. Friends in the peace movement have put her in touch with a lawyer who has volunteered his services. "Maybe it would help if people knew what was going on," she says distractedly.

Mild, except about the war, Mrs. Dudley, a widow, lives in a sparsely furnished one-room apartment in Washington. She is beside herself about bomber pilots on television saying they are "just doing a job," about people who tell her they are praying for her son, and about people who refuse to think about the war.

"It's a mess for the families," she says. "Time stopped, but I never forget for a moment about the North Vietnamese and those bombs."