LIFE

10 NOV 72

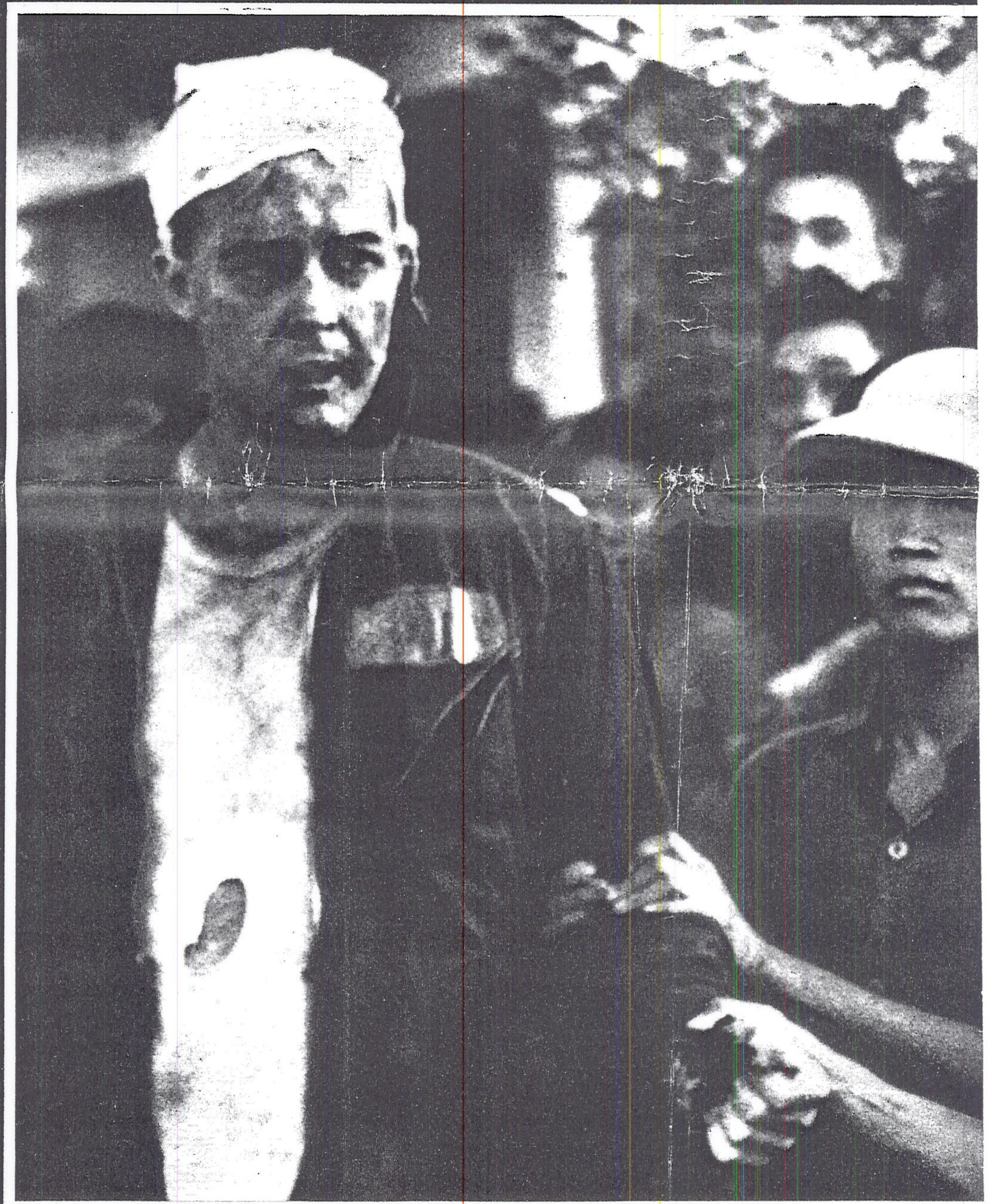
QUESTIONS FOR A PEACE

543 POWs: what shape are they in?

1,271 MIAs: how many are alive?

Where does it leave us?

An Ohio town talks of the war



Navy Lt. Ronald Dodge shown as a captive, but Hanoi denies any knowledge of him

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When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again

– or doesn't

As the country looks hopefully toward a Vietnam settlement, these women find their very special hope mixed with fear

In 1970, Hanoi listed Maj. Wilmer Grubb, USAF, as having died nine days after he was shot down Jan. 26, 1966. But from February 1966 through late 1969, they published photos like the one at left showing Grubb, in apparent good health, after being captured. The Pentagon lists him as a POW. Such questions about their missing or captured husbands and relatives obsess members of the National League of POW-MIA Families (meeting, above, in Washington).

by LOUDON WAINWRIGHT

The woman's son, a helicopter pilot, had been missing in action in South Vietnam since the spring of 1969. As she was saying to the general, she had seen a report of the engagement in which her son's chopper had been shot down. It had exploded on impact, and witnesses flying over the scene had not observed any signs of life. Nothing had been heard of any of the crew in the years since. The woman told the general that she had gradually come to believe that her son was never coming back. She had about decided to give up hope that he was alive.

When she said that, the general stood, plainly upset. He had been a prisoner of war himself, in World War II, and had thus been in his own eyes a beneficiary of hope. Of course it looked bad, he told the woman. But the miracle of survival struck in the toughest places. It was terribly important, he said, that she make herself believe, until she *knew* otherwise, that her son could have survived. That hope, he said, must always be held. It would give her strength, and—who knows?—it might even help her son. The woman looked calmly up at the gen-

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Carole Hanson, at left with her son Todd, 6, believes the man in the picture at right is her husband, Capt. Stephen Hanson (shown above before he was shot down in 1967). He is listed as missing in action and has never seen Todd, who was born ten days after Hanson left for Vietnam.

Carole Hanson thinks this man is her husband...

The intricate welcome-home plan

CONTINUED

eral and waited while he spoke his conviction. "Bullshit," she said with great force when he finished.

The new and solid possibilities of a cease-fire in Indochina have powerfully stirred the deepest personal feelings of a very small group of Americans. Of course, the price paid by the U.S. dead and wounded and by their families is not to be compared. Yet the families of our prisoners of war and men missing in action have known a special pain, and the luckiest of them face the sudden and incredible prospect that their men might be home—Good God!—for Christmas. Thus for the relatives of more than 500 men, some of whom have been gone for as long as eight years, there was profound relief, expectation and joy—along with the knowledge that there would be some painful shocks to follow.

The news had quite different effects on the families of the more than 1,200 men who are missing in action. Though some of these men will doubtless come back, a substantial majority of them are probably dead. For many of their relatives, this sudden change in the situation brought renewed spasms of uncertainty and hope. A few found it a painful intrusion: one woman, who had divorced her long-missing husband some time ago, was thrown into doubt about whether to wait or to go ahead with the wedding she had planned for next month.

For the families of the missing, the prospective homecoming of those men not their own suddenly hurt. Some, who had brought themselves to the brink of acknowledging the worst, realized that their grief could not be complete without a further accounting for their men. In many cases no such accounting can ever be made—no trace will ever be found of many who exploded into dank mountainsides in Laos or into the South China Sea, of certain wounded lost forever in the jungle that enveloped them, or men captured and then disposed of by villagers understandably enraged by the bombs that had scourged *them* from the skies.

But many men will be coming back, and a special task force, set up by the Department of Defense in the spring of 1971, is ready with a detailed plan. It is called "Operation Egress Recap," a bit of Pentagonese that even the Pentagon now declares it can't translate. The plan lays heavy and good emphasis on the long-range rehabilitation of the prisoners, and much study has been given to the problems that long absences have created for the families as well as for the prisoners. The families of the missing, too, are included in the preparations, as are the families of 53 civilians captive or vanished in Indochina.

Egress Recap is run by Dr. Roger Shields, a young, bulky, crew-cut Ph.D. in economics; his staff includes experts on many matters from all the military services. The possible range of medical problems alone is enormous. "We cannot

This picture of an unidentified American airman was released by the North Vietnamese in 1968. Since that time it has been studied by hundreds of wives and families of men who are missing or held prisoner in Southeast Asia. According to the POW-MIA league, 28 different families have claimed the man coming out of the jungle as their own. For some it is a firm conviction, for others, simply a shred of hope. Like the fate of Ronald Dodge (cover), this man's identity remains a mystery that perhaps only the war's end will clear up.

. . . but 27 other families think he's theirs

is called Operation Egress Recap

forecast all the possibilities," says Shields. "Every time a new man comes home [64 prisoners have escaped or been released] we make revisions." The prisoners who just got back from Hanoi, for instance, say that many of their comrades held in North Vietnamese camps are in relatively good condition. But health will vary according to the circumstances of capture and captivity.

Some special difficulties are predicted. One prisoner's wife in Arizona, Ruth Bomar, feels certain that her air force husband is desperately ill of a kidney disease diagnosed before he was captured. She bases her feelings on an apparent code in her husband's letters. In one he said that his brother, who makes fiber-glass boats, should build him a fiber-glass rocking chair. In a later letter he wrote he would want a wheelchair of the same material instead. In a third letter he said that his brother should start working on a "new fiber-glass vault," a request which naturally led his wife to the awful conclusion that Lt. Col. Jack Bomar was convinced he was dying. But her hopes are up again now that it looks possible he will be coming home.

The plan starts with the expectation that the prisoners will be turned over in groups to U.S. authorities outside North Vietnam, possibly in Laos. Those men who don't require urgent medical care will be flown to big overseas processing centers nearby, like Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. After a further medical check and initial debriefing to find out about men missing or not returned, those who are judged ready to go on will fly to the States aboard planes where every man will have his own bed, seat and private escort. Each will probably be taken to the service hospital nearest his home. Private family reunions will take place then. According to Dr. Shields's fastidious construction, "The precise manner and timing of the reunion and those in attendance will be determined by medical advice and by the desires of the returnee and his family."

Even before he gets home, however, the ex-prisoner, with repaired teeth and new glasses if he needs them, outfitted with fresh uniforms complete with updated decorations and insignia of rank, will be able to find out something about the country and the family he left behind. Waiting at the overseas base for each man is a brochure which reports the state of his promotions, pay and savings. A private file will contain family messages, photographs, perhaps a favorite pair of slippers. He will get information on important personal matters like births, marriages, divorces and deaths that he might not have heard about in his letters from home. If he expresses any interest in catching up on recent world history, films (of past Super Bowls, for example), records and news synopses have been collected for him. About the year 1968, for instance, he can learn that on Jan. 2 "retired dentist Philip Blaiberg, with fatal

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heart ailment, gets 'new' heart in world's second heart transplant operation," on April 3 "Hanoi offers to talk with U.S. toward an end of war," on April 4 "civil rights leader Martin Luther King shot to death by a white man at Memphis, Tennessee," on June 8 "millions watch as Senator Robert Kennedy is buried next to his brother President John Kennedy at Arlington Cemetery," on Dec. 21 "Apollo 8 makes man's first close-up approach to moon. Orbits around moon on Christmas Eve and sends back TV pictures." Whatever the men know about some of these events, the shock of catching up will still be extraordinary. "You know," says one Pentagon press officer earnestly, "some of these guys don't even know who Lee Trevino is."

Back in the States, the man will get still another physical, this one so thorough it requires a 48-page questionnaire. Besides skin diseases, parasites, problems connected with malnutrition or old injuries, lung and circulatory system troubles, eye problems and dental cavities, doctors will also be checking the men for emotional problems.

This is the area of greatest sensitivity. Some wives are already furious at published implications that their men might be coming home in a state somewhat short of eager readiness to take on their roles as husbands and fathers. "My husband is no goddam baby," a POW wife from California says. "He was a man when he went away and that's how he's coming home." The woman may be right about her husband, but many men will simply not be ready for sudden immersion in the loving and not-so-loving chaos of American family life. Doctors at the Center for Prisoner of War Studies, a navy facility in San Diego, have collected a great amount of detailed information about all the known prisoners of this and other wars, and have conducted interviews with many family members. Their research indicates that however healthy a returned prisoner may seem, he is likely to have some difficulty with homecoming.

The most recent POW press conference took place Oct. 5, when Hanoi displayed these four U.S. pilots. All of them had been captured since Aug. 17, 1972.

A lot depends on the ex-prisoner's image of himself. One former POW saw himself "as part hero, part coward, part oddity, and part modern version of Rip Van Winkle." Absence does little for an unfond heart. Rip Van Winkle was relieved, after his 20-year nap, to find that his henpecking wife had died. At least one POW wife is planning to ask her husband for a divorce as soon as she feels he is ready to handle the problem.

Most prisoners go through an emotional cycle, beginning with shock and depression at capture. A certain hyper-awareness in which the captive is extremely sensitive to everything around him follows, and then a kind of memory gathering sets in. Here a man in isolation may reconstruct entire events in his life moment by moment in a detailed loving replay. But fantasy inevitably takes over, making the realities that follow release even harder to deal with. "When the released prisoner arrives home," says one important study, "he [sometimes] finds little understanding; family hardships matched against his personal hell; estranged wives, children who don't know him, or worse, don't even like him; changed economy, styles, work situation or service . . . troublesome feelings of guilt, chronic depression . . . futility, hostility and withdrawal. Overuse of alcohol is frequent. . . . The observed incidence of emotional disturbance and mortality has been significantly high." Surely a contributing factor to such homecoming anguish is the fact that the ex-prisoners can look around themselves, as great numbers of other returning veterans have already done, and find that most of their countrymen seem indifferent to their misfortunes and sacrifices.

Among family problems, growing or grown sons and daughters of prisoners can expect conflict with fathers who find the youth folkways of America unrecognizable. Difficulties may arise from the new, necessary independence of many prisoners' wives. Their husbands' absence has usually meant a complete take-over of responsibility and initiative. Acting either in groups or alone in pursuit of their men's release, many women have emerged as forceful, articulate individuals whom people like Henry Kissinger address with care as well as courtesy. They have found out a lot about the uses of power and are unlikely to be content to change back into the major's sweet wife who is docile at home and, to advance her husband's career, chatters agreeably to the tiresome general and his dimwit wife.

The prisoners' families have played a big part in pushing for the Egress Recap plans. In the biggest of their organizations, the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, a committee has studied the various problems of homecoming. At the head of this group is Iris R. Powers, a bright-eyed and deceptively comfy-appearing woman who now and then flashes a salty bluntness. One of her two sons went down in his Chinook helicopter in South Vietnam three years ago and is listed as missing in action. Mrs. Powers does not expect to see him again. "When you read

TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 38

'It's like planning to get married again'

At the news of a possible cease-fire LIFE's *Martha Fay talked to the wives of four prisoners about what they expect when their men come home.*

LYNDA GRAY, *wife of Capt. David Gray, USAF, shot down over North Vietnam Jan. 23, 1967. No children.*

The fear of hope is one of the things you learn to live with. When David was shot down, I didn't even know what MIA meant. He was missing for almost a year, and I had this vision of him wandering around Hanoi with people calling out David, David. I went through the whole grief cycle, thinking he was dead. Now, with this latest news, I've ordered all his things out of storage. I don't know what he'd feel if he walked in here now. His clothes, his personal things aren't here. I want him to feel he belongs here, to see his old football helmet, his toy soldiers.

In his letters he doesn't talk about what might have changed, and it worries me. Some women think that when their men return they'll just live happily ever after. But I don't know. There's no tie between us, no children. It's sort of like planning to get married again, only I haven't seen the bridegroom in six years.

Returned prisoners have told us that when

you're captured, you decide whether you'll make it or not. Then everything goes toward that. The same thing is true for the families. I must survive. I must remain a human being. I'll use whatever it takes. I've sort of turned off religion, but I can go up to my river place and throw out a line and find God or something.

Whenever I think of him, I picture a 90-pound weakling with teeth missing and clumps of hair falling out. But then I saw how good Mark Gartley looked when he got back and I had to change my idea of David around.

I sent him a picture of me in a red dress with sort of a short skirt, and he wrote back that he was amazed at the difference in style, but he approved. Thanks, fella.

ANDREA RANDER, *wife of Sgt. 1/C Donald Rander, U.S. Army intelligence, captured at Hué in 1968. Two daughters, ages 6 and 12.*

Right before this news broke, I was really ready to give this life up and go on to something else. I figured five years is a long time, no matter how much you love a person. Now I'm up again. I'm mentally trying to get us back together even before he gets here. We had a pretty good marriage, but I know we're going to have some problems. He's just not going to walk in that door and be the same man who left. I've never had any letters. Just word that he was alive and held prisoner. Since Donald's been gone, I've never been able to listen to the tapes he made before he was captured. The other night my younger daughter wanted to listen to them. I suddenly realized that she couldn't remember her daddy's voice.

On our wedding anniversary a while ago, the children knew I was feeling depressed. When I got home from work, they had the table set and a cake baked and a sign on what would be Donald's chair that said, "This chair is for our missing Daddy."

I was sort of independent even before Donald was captured, making out bills and doing things around the house. But when he was here, it was a pleasure to depend on him. I've been practicing my cooking a lot. The girls call me "the gourmet cook." But Donald loved to eat. I can't wait to fatten him up.

LOUISE MULLIGAN, *wife of Capt. James Mulligan, U.S. Navy, downed over North Vietnam March 20, 1966. Six sons, ages 10 to 22.*

It may be a little frightening. He's a hero to us. All I can remember are the good things. I have to remember some of the things that used to annoy me about him. There are some little things that will surprise him, like the house we moved into had a lavender bedroom. Well, there's no way Jim Mulligan is going to live with lavender. We painted the room but the drapes are still up, lavender with blue tassels. Every time one of the kids comes in I hear, *Mother*, when are you going to get *rid* of them?

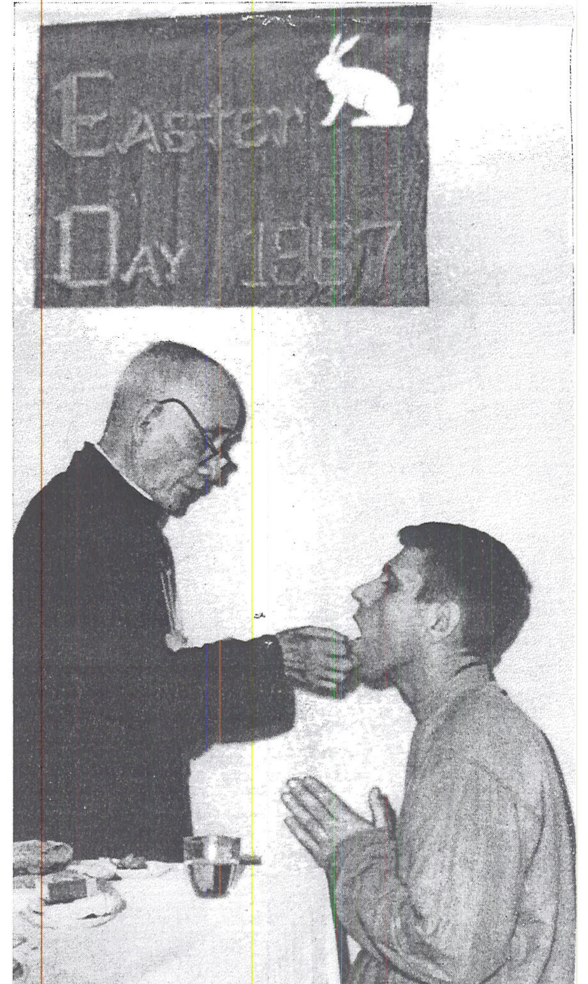
I'm concerned about the children's relationship to their father. *I* can't ever remember *not* being married, but they have not really had a male authority. The group psychiatrist says that the boys are all young men now and it will be between them and their father. It'll have nothing to do with me. They'll have to make their own peace. Jim has seen pictures of me and tells me I look great. I told him that raising six boys through their teens was really something. It should be against the law.

EILEEN CORMIER, *wife of Senior M.Sgt. Arthur Cormier, USAF, shot down over North Vietnam Nov. 6, 1965. Two daughters, two sons, ages 8 to 12.*

I think for us it can be a really rewarding second time around. But the children and I have our own relationships and patterns. He has to break into that. You've got to realize that my life now is very orderly. The first time he opposes a decision I've made, it won't sit well with me. I find myself thinking, if he lays one hand on one of the kids *I've* raised, God help him. I want to sit across the table from my husband and be able to fight with him and have him be up to it. But any way you look at it, I'm going to turn out to be the heavy. You have to live through it to know the rage. I'm not a honey anymore.

When he was first captured, I thought, my God, the children are doomed! but it hasn't worked out that way. They talk about their father, but they don't really remember him. We have a film of him going to mass in Hanoi, and we run it often. We watch him go up to Communion, then we reverse it and watch him go backwards, and we laugh. I think he will suffer a great deal of disillusionment. He'll think the world has noticed what he's done, when it's pretty much gone about its own business. Where is his place in the world? I wish I could tell him that his suffering would end all wars.

At Easter, 1967, Arthur Cormier was photographed taking Communion from a North Vietnamese priest in Hanoi. Other pictures of him were released on several occasions during his seven-year imprisonment.



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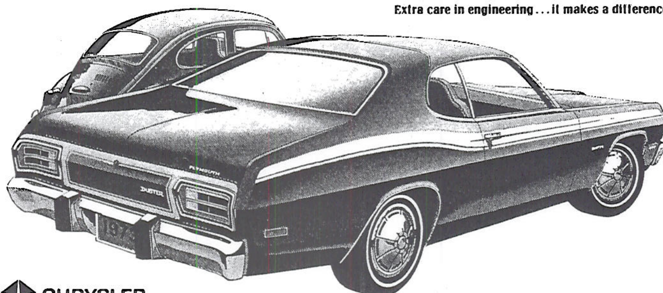

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'You know he's not coming back. No way'

Iris Powers runs a committee that has studied the homecoming problems for the men and their families.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 36

the eyewitness reports," she says, "you know he's not coming back. No way."

Her own situation has not prevented Iris Powers from taking a big interest in the men who will return. She and her associates at the League have been forceful with recommendations to the Pentagon and to various legislative bodies about financial protection, career guidance, legal assistance, medical care, education. They are convinced that the returning prisoners and their families, as well as the families of the missing, are a special legacy of responsibility and rate long-range attention. All sorts of factors, including age, background and possible goals, have been taken into account. The prisoners of other American wars have not received such consideration.

The military services have largely done a thorough and conscientious job in helping the families and in preparing for the men's return. But Mrs. Powers, a consultant to both the army and the navy in these matters, is not loath to nail the Defense Department with the tag of "benevolent paternalism." Long the victims of a government which was quite willing to use them for its own political and propaganda ends, women of the League and other POW organizations have become masterful blasters of the bureaucracy.

The families of the missing have the worst time of it. People in this predicament are repeatedly surprised to find that their occasional thoughts of suicide are widely shared within the group. "The grief cycle" can only end for many of them with *knowing what happened*, and that information is often tragically elusive. The slightest glimmer of hope sets off the Yo-Yo of anguish and expectation. The military requires strong evidence before officially declaring that a man is dead. Sometimes the requirements seem too strong. One

woman says about her friend's husband: "The report reads that his buddies turned him over after he was hit to take the radio off him, and they saw this gaping hole in his chest. Right then he was alive. Then they had to leave him in the jungle. That's all. But he's missing in action."

"To tell you to have hope is sometimes the cruelest thing people can do for you," says the wife of a missing man. "Some chaplains are awful when they tell you that prayer will help. What's a praying wife or parent supposed to think when he doesn't come back then? That they didn't pray hard enough? That they didn't go to mass enough? Silence can be kinder than such advice."

Norma Mitchell is a pretty and soft-voiced woman who had been married to an air force pilot for two years when he was listed as missing in action in 1968. They had no children. "It is hard for most people to grasp," she says about the dilemma of not knowing, "but it's the most continually draining thing that you can imagine." Mrs. Mitchell has been working on a League study directed at the families of the missing. One question that the study asks involves the preparedness of people to accept a change in their man's status from missing to killed in action, should such a change take place. Most of those who have replied say that they are ready for the change now.

Still, it is hard to bring the business to an end. In the trunk of her car, which was her son's before he left, Iris Powers has left a couple of unopened boxes containing the clothing and possessions that Lowell Powers had in Vietnam. They were sent home to her when he was listed as missing. She wishes, of course, that the boxes were someplace else, and she keeps putting off the day when she will open them and face what's inside. ■

Norma Mitchell, the wife of a missing pilot, says: "You keep thinking, 'My husband will turn up.'"

'Telling you to have hope can be cruel'

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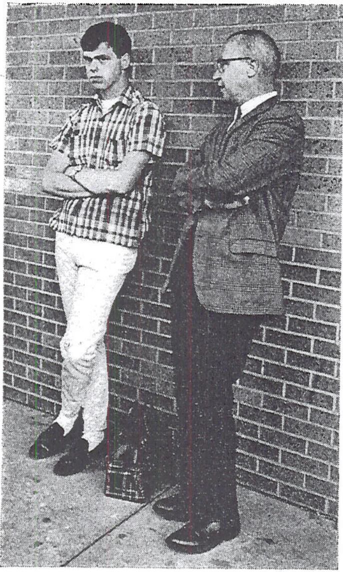


In 1966, draftee Tim Edwards bid his father goodbye (above). He wound up in Vietnam but returned unscathed to marry, become a father and a homeowner (right). On the war: "It *had* to be worth it. You can't say it was useless when so many died."

No Bells for Peace

Six years after its first death, Massillon, Ohio looks at the war

Photographed by
JOHN OLSON
and BILL RAY

Robert Wuertz buried his son in 1966 (above), Massillon's first war death. Today (left), the Wuertzes still grieve and he is bitter. It was, he says, "the most useless war in history," prolonged by "horsetraders whose sons have not been near Vietnam."

Six years have passed since the Vietnam war brought its first death to Massillon —and since LIFE visited the Ohio town to report on how its people felt about the darkening war. In the interim, what seems like a whole generation has grown up, gone to work in the steel mills, bought houses and started families. Many of Massillon's young men have gone into the armed forces, some to Vietnam. But last week hardly anybody—even at the VFW or American Legion—knew for sure how many actually lost their lives there. The figure is 13. And now, the prospect of peace is unmarked by celebration, and the real cost of the war is being forgotten by people absorbed with everyday matters: unemployment, inflation, a new car or the high school football team. The families of those killed or missing or taken prisoner suffer; but in Massillon, as in most of the U.S., they do so silently.

Massillon is a gritty little blue-collar town of 32,000 that in 1966 was increasingly worried about U.S. involvement and beginning to doubt the government's credibility. Credibility is still a question, though less sharply focused. Today the people of Massillon display mainly a chastened weariness, a relief that someone is finally about to end it. There is also a measure of skepticism and cynicism about what we have accomplished. Said one young veteran bitterly, when asked about POWs: "You say POW around here, people think you're talking about some new kind of car."

Ten Massillon high school graduates, all Vietnam veterans, stand in a downtown intersection. None was permanently disabled except Rusty Grim, 25, fourth from left, who was badly shot up in a mortar attack. Grim considers himself lucky: "There were more than a hundred guys in my hospital ward, and only three of us had all our limbs." Four of their Massillon friends, including three from the same block, died in Vietnam. The idea of amnesty particularly enrages ex-football star John Rose, third from left. "I'd like to meet one of those dudes who ran to Canada," he says, pounding his fists.

Some paid the price of war...

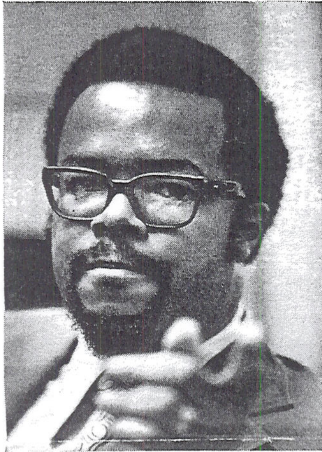
At left, Terry Tuersley, 24, wheels his chair along a Massillon sidewalk. Crippled in a battle accident, he is happy to be alive. When he went to Vietnam, Tuersley thought the war was necessary. Now: "We shouldn't have been there in the first place."

The first generation of Massillon high school students free from the threat of the war is still wary: "There'll probably be another war coming along sooner or later," said one boy. "When your time comes, it comes."

...but most were spared

Tom Girdler, hawkish in '66, welcomes peace

"I'm happy that it is finally about over. One reason it dragged on so long was that this country was divided by the protests. If I had been a Vietcong listening to Spock and Fulbright and McGovern, I would have kept on fighting and hoped one of them was elected. I never felt that we should



Bill Reynolds: 'I feel bitter about the war'

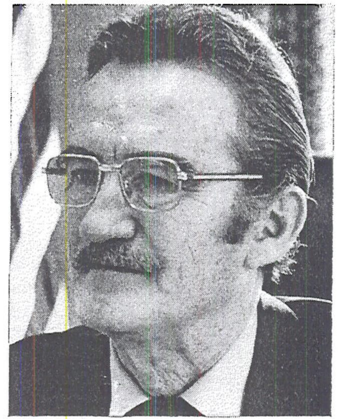
"A disproportionate number of blacks died in Vietnam. My hope is that some of the energy and money that have been going to the war will now be available to education and housing and America's other postponed problems. I feel bitter about the war. The American people were lied to for so long that I'm not sure they have any faith left in their government. It will take a long time for this country to heal from Vietnam. Nobody has won this war, but maybe the biggest losers were the Americans."

The graves of Lawrence and Roy Porter, brothers killed in Vietnam, lie in a cemetery near Massillon

have gotten into Vietnam, but once in, we should have won it. We could have. We still could, but in terms of what it would do to this country, I don't think it is worth the price. It was a long year for me that my son spent over there. Nobody won this war, but I think you could call what Nixon has gotten a settlement within the bounds of honor. I would be ashamed if we had pulled out as McGovern suggested. I'm old-fashioned enough to think that national honor is important."

Vivian McDonald had a son killed in Vietnam

"I hope we walk out of it with an honorable cease-fire. I'd hate for these kids to have died in vain. My son thought we were there for a purpose and were accomplishing our goal. Until you lose a son yourself, you don't really know how you feel about this entire issue. He was our whole life."



Mayor Mark Ross: 'What did we gain? How many yards?'

"You take your previous wars, the reasoning was different. They bombed Pearl Harbor, so we went after them. I don't *really* understand why we're over there—maybe to contain communism. I had five brothers in World War II; you could feel close to that war. But this one, on television you see those Vietnamese kids crying and running, their little huts all burned up. It's hard to understand what we're doing. What did we gain? How many feet, how many yards? I'll be very happy that it's going to end, but where's the next one going to spring up?"

Irma Buckland, whose son served twice in Vietnam

"My husband and I lived and slept and ate that war when Joe was in Vietnam. And we were all alone. In other wars there was a togetherness in the country; if you had a boy fighting, everybody was worried. With this war, everybody is so busy that they don't have any time to let you put your head on their shoulder when you worry."

'I'm not the one to say who was right or wrong in this war'

For Bettie Stanton of Massillon, the meaning of peace in Vietnam has to do with her brother, army Sp5 Ronald Stanton, who is missing in action. For four years, since her brother was shot down in his helicopter over the DMZ, she has nurtured the hope that he is alive. She has had little reason, besides faith, to keep hoping. Her only contact has been a monthly letter from the Pentagon, saying that there is no new information. Her letters to her brother have been returned from North Vietnam unopened. With peace, Bettie Stanton may find out for sure. "I have my hopes up that he comes home," she says, "but I'm afraid to keep them up too much." Her brother, who would now be 27, was drafted into the army. "It wasn't no more than right that he do his duty," she says. "I really don't like the war, but I'm not the one to say who was right or wrong in this war."