

## Stark Letter

JAN 4 1972

# SFChronicle Disabled Vet's Plea to Hanoi

Portland, Ore.

The Indochina war has seared the life of James P. Meade Jr. Now he is asking the North Vietnamese to forgive his role in the war and let him take the place of an American prisoner of war.

Meade, 26, left his young wife, Kathy, and the University of Oregon six years ago to become an Army helicopter pilot in Vietnam.

In four months, the young chief warrant officer flew 250 missions. He crashed three times. The third time, his luck ran out. He suffered severe injuries, including brain damage.

### COMA

He was in a coma when a neurosurgeon told Kathy, four months pregnant at the time, "I doubt that he'll ever be able to function as a human being."

When Meade finally opened his eyes, they were vacant and unfocused.

But he began to improve. In two years, the brain damage mended and he again learned to walk and talk, laugh and cry, read and write.

He returned to his native Portland, was graduated from the two-year Mt. Hood Community College and now is studying for a bachelor's degree in psychology at Portland State University.

### LOSSES

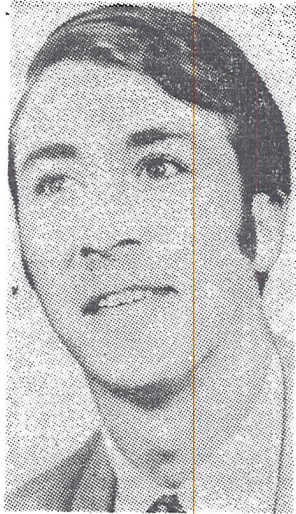
He has endured the break-up of his marriage and the death in 1970 of his younger brother, David, in Vietnam.

Meade's speech is slightly slurred. His walk is wobbly. His manual dexterity is poor. He tires quickly and has periodic epileptic seizures.

The Army has classified him 100 per cent disabled, and he receives government benefits totaling nearly \$1000 a month. Some of it goes for the support of his 6-year-old son.

### LETTER

Meade sent a letter Tuesday to Le Duc Tho, Hanoi's negotiator at the Paris talks, and offered himself as a



AP Wirephoto

### JAMES MEAD Shot down three times

prisoner of war for the safe return of one American POW.

He wrote that he thought he was doing the right thing while serving as a helicopter pilot. But he added, "Today, however, I know I was wrong. I will not apologize for what I have done because a million apologies will not undo my past. But I do beg your forgiveness."

"I grieve for the men who are sent over there. I grieve for the pilots that are captured and for their families. And I grieve for the people they kill."

### 'LOVE'

He added: "Sir, America is my home, and I love it. Still, in its quest of world leadership through the use of its military power, it is dooming itself. The American people are not evil even though our government makes us seem evil."

In a slow, sometimes shaky voice, Meade speaks of the five medals he won and of his father, a career Army officer still in Vietnam.

But most often his conversation alludes to his brother, whose death convinced him, he says, that he had to do something about the war.

"I miss David," he says. "I'm very lonely without him."

Associated Press