

# How Families Learned The POWs Are Alive

## New York

In their bamboo prison cages deep in the jungles of South Vietnam, the four men were given pen and paper. They scratched brief messages of greetings to their loved ones.

On Wednesday these letters were mailed special delivery in New York City.

And the postman would bring to four more American families the news that for many, many months they had hardly allowed themselves to believe: their men were still alive.

"God bless you! Oh, God bless you!" exclaimed Mrs. Virgil O'Connor when she learned at home in Warren, Mich., that a letter from her son Michael was on the way.

## OFFICER

He was a U. S. Army warrant officer when shot down in his helicopter on Feb. 4, 1968, during the Tet offensive battle for Hue.

Two months later a released prisoner reported seeing him alive. But in the five years since then, the O'Connors had heard nothing about him. He is now 25.

Now a ten-line letter is on the way, brought back to America by an American delegation that visited Hanoi during the Christmas holiday.

Mrs. Orvis Parsells of Sarasota, Fla., was unbelieving when she heard that a letter from her 27-year-old son John would be arriving soon.

"I'm hoping and praying you're telling the truth," she said. "John was shot down in his helicopter on Feb. 5, 1970."

"The Pentagon told us he

was a prisoner of war. Apparently his name was broadcast once over Radio Hanoi, but this will be the first word from him."

John Parsells is a U. S. Army captain, a graduate of Southeast High School in Bradenton, Fla.

## LETTER

Another letter was from Jose Manuel Astorga of San Diego, Calif. His mother was not at home Thursday, but neighbors said he was shot down May 1, 1972, and his mother had been advised by the Pentagon that he is alive.

The fourth letter was from Bruce Raymond Archer to his relatives in Pensacola, Fla.

The four letters from prisoners in the South were among 600 brought back from Hanoi by the Committee of Liaison with Families of American Prisoners of

War.

The other letters were described as being from prisoners in the North. The significance of the four is that they came from men who had not been heard from previously, the visitors said.

## FATE

Americans captured in battle in the south have been swallowed up in the jungles. They have become as phantom-like as their captors, the Viet Cong, and their fate has been a matter for conjecture.

Their fate is markedly different from that of U.S. pilots shot down over North Vietnam who are installed in the "Hanoi Hilton" prison camp in central Hanoi and given access to regular mail deliveries, food packages and visiting Americans.

Hundreds of Americans are missing in South Vietnam but only a few more



UPI Telephoto

**MICHAEL O'CONNOR**  
A prisoner since 1968

than a score of them have written to relatives.

Both Mrs. O'Connor and Mrs. Parsells said they have frequently mailed food packages but that these were always returned. Their letters did not come back but the women did not know whether the packages had been delivered.

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