

Kin of P.O.W.'s on L.I. Cheer Prospect of Return

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BALDWIN, L.I., Jan. 24 — The first phone call Mrs. Jane Storms, sister of an Air Force prisoner of war, made last night she learned her brother may be coming home and canceled a full-page advertisement scheduled for tomorrow publicizing the plight of the men being held in Southeast Asia.

It was an advertisement she and the Long Island League of Families of American Prisoners have been planning for two years. But, she said today, the cancellation was one of the happiest actions she had taken in the four years since the league was founded and the five years since her brother was first shot down over North Vietnam.

Today was the time for rejoicing, but cautious celebration, in the homes of 22 families across Long Island where relatives were missing in action or held captive in North Vietnamese prison camps. A time for incessant telephone calls from relatives, friends, even casual acquaintances from across the nation. And even perhaps time for a little dreaming of the welcome home two months from now.

"Chuck's high school, Port Jefferson High School, honored him on his fifth year of captivity," said Mrs. Charles Rice, whose son Navy Lieut. Charles Rice was captured when his plane was shot down Oct. 26, 1967.

P.O.W.-M.I.A. Flag Hoisted

"At that time they hoisted a P.O.W.-M.I.A. flag and said it would fly until he came home. Now they're planning another ceremony when he does come home. They'll let him take it down."

"I'm sure that will be very meaningful to him," she added. "His high school days were very happy days."

The relatives of the 22 P.O.W.-M.I.A.'s from Long Island first began to organize nearly four years ago and, according to Mrs. Storms, will to be disbanded until "every possible missing in action is accounted for."

"We no doubt will be going out of business," Mrs. Storms added, "which we have been waiting quite a long time to do."

But today, Mrs. Storms, her husband and other members of the Long Island League sent out more than 400 "Viva" bracelets—the silver bracelets inscribed with the name of a P.O.W. or M.I.A. that had been

used as a fund-raising device for the organization and "to publicize our view."

"Some of the people who have worn these bracelets, or most, will mail them to the man's family when he returns," Mrs. Storms explained, "showing that really while this man was sitting in a P.O.W. camp and being fed articles that were anti-American about anti-war protests, this will renew their faith that not all people were willing to forget them."

Mrs. Storms and the parents and wives of other P.O.W.'s and those missing in action from Long Island were also bitter that they were not allowed to organize or even join together until about four years ago.

Forbidden to Discuss Kin

"Until that time the Government told us we were not even to discuss our relatives with our neighbors," Mrs. Storms said. "Perhaps if we had been able to discuss this originally there would not be as many men in the M.I.A. category."

Since 1970, however, the families of the Long Island P.O.W.'s, all strangers until then, has almost become one large family.

Last night, in Long Beach, L.I., Mrs. Storms, and Paul and Barbara Callaghan, parents of Air Force Capt. Peter A. Callaghan, gathered at the home of Mrs. Mildred Fowler whose brother Marine Maj. Albert Pitt has been missing in action since seven years ago today.

They clustered around the television set in the living room of the Fowler home. They groaned when an extra floodlight connected by a WCBS-TV technician blew every fuse in the house and the television set went dark minutes before President Nixon was due to speak.

Candles quickly appeared and transistor radios, but at the last minute the lights came on again and the families leaned forward eagerly. As the speech ended, the Callaghans embraced smiling broadly. Mrs. Fowler rushed from the room in tears and Mrs. Storms sat staring into space in disbelief; the knuckles of her clenched fists white.

"Our work is still not finished," Mrs. Storms said as she recovered from what she described as the "shock of the President's words."

"Not until we make certain the Administration accounts for every M.A.I. in Southeast Asia."