

Patient sat the Veterans Administration Hospital at First Avenue and 24th Street watching on television Tuesday night as President Nixon told of the agreement to end the war in Vietnam. The New York Times/Michael Evans

## Town That Paid High Price Recalls Its Dead

By **ANDREW H. MALCOLM**  
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BEALLSVILLE, Ohio, Jan. 24—The wind whips through the wires up on Cemetery Hill here these days, rustling the long dried grass and banging the rope on the new metal flagpole.

At the foot of the pole is a plain plaque. It says: "In Honor Of Those Who Served Our Country. 'He causeth wars to cease.' Psalms 46:9." "It's a darn shame it couldn't have ended a few years sooner," said Joe Decker, "at least for us here."

He was referring to the war in Vietnam and to this sleepy town which is home to 452 persons. For its population, Beallsville (pronounced Bellsville) was hit perhaps as hard as a town could be hit.

### Was It Worth It?

It lost seven of its sons to the Vietnam war.

In New York state the same proportion of war deaths would be about 278,000, or nearly 70 times the state's actual toll of 3,985. Today, the townspeople—the coalminers, aluminum workers and farmers — talked

about the war and the cease-fire, which they said they would believe when they saw it.

"The cease-fire is wonderful," said Mrs. Nelda Gramlich, "but I wonder if it was all worth it."

And Beallsville has had questions about the war before. In 1969, shocked by its casualty rate, the town asked the Department of Defense not to send any more of its young men to Vietnam. The request was denied.

Today, like many residents along Beallsville's three, curbless streets here in the Allegheny foothills, 100 miles southwest of Pittsburgh, Mrs. Gramlich was not too keen to talk about the war.

And Sonny Lawrence, who works at the gas station, said, "We've lost more over there than we'll ever get back but it seems like people are trying to forget about the war before it's even over."

Last night, for instance, when the President went on television to announce a cease-fire, many townspeople were up at the high school basketball game watching the

Beallsville Blue Devils lose to Bishop Donohue.

Today, only one person mentioned the cease-fire as he picked up his mail from Harry Decker, the postmaster. And this morning when Henry A. Kissinger went on television to explain the peace accord, Mayor Ollis Thornberry was too busy to listen as he installed a new washing machine over at Sam Britton's house.

It was, as oldtimers here would say, a "peaceable day." Along the ridges and down in the hollows that George Washington surveyed 230 years ago the school children stood by the road, their lunch pails clutched firmly in the early morning darkness, as they awaited their school bus.

### Sun and Snow

Soon the sun was melting some of the inch-deep snow on the ground and shining weakly on the hand-lettered signs—"Fresh Eggs For Sale"—that stand by dozens of driveways hereabouts.

Riley's Sunoco station, which has a "radar oven" to heat sandwiches, again sold several dozen cheeseburgers and "torpedoes" to students who opted against their school's luncheon menu today. Barbecued potato chips were also a big item.

But out at the Earl Pittman house it was not so gay. For Jack Pittman, their 20-year-old son, died in Vietnam of a shrapnel wound in the head in 1966. He was the first of Beallsville's boys to die there. Six more were to follow and another died at an air base in the United States.

"For I guess," said Mrs. Maegene Pittman, his mother, "when you lose all you've got, all you've got to live for, you become a little bitter."

One day seven years ago the Pittmans got a telegram that their son was wounded but not seriously. For seven days they heard nothing more.

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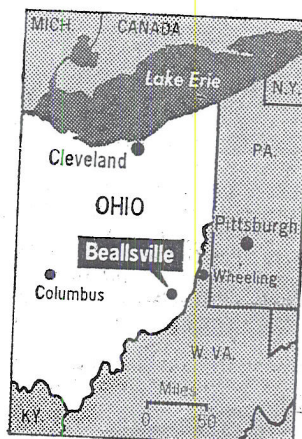
which Beallsville's young men could not afford to be. A total of 35 local men were drafted in the war's later years.

So the town passed around a weathered baseball hat and collected \$1,080 for the flag-pole and plaque. But even then, townspeople were careful to point out that it was not so much opposition to the war that aroused them.

It was the feeling that their little town with no traffic light had done its part and that those controlling United States participation in the war were not doing theirs.

"As big as the United States is," Mrs. Pittman said, "we just got sucked in and in and in. I think we could have gotten a treaty sooner if we just put our foot down. They tied our boys' hands over there."

Mr. Thornberry feels the same. "We should have had that heavy bombing a long time ago," he said, "then we'd have gotten a treaty sooner. I think now maybe



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we'll have some peace for a while. We're getting out with some honor and Mr. Nixon is doing his part."

His wife, Madeline, had some doubts, however. "You can't trust North Vietnam," she said, "even when they're signing a treaty, I'm afraid they may have other ideas on their mind. It all just seems too good to be true. And I'm wondering why."

#### Other Suspicions

There were others with other suspicions. "I want to know why we couldn't have had the same settlement years ago," said Ed Witzberger, "and why does it take three days to stop fighting. How'd you feel if your boy got hurt or killed between now and then?"

"It's a war for nothing but weapons experimenting," added Fred Riley. "You watch, the Communists are going to control that place within five years."

An older woman who asked that her name be withheld said, "I'm not going to get excited till they quit fighting. I welcome peace, but you can't trust politicians any more."

"I'm like a lot of people here," said Postmaster Decker. "I don't think that war should even have been."

"Me, too," said Charles McDougall, a construction worker who was picking up his mail. "It wasn't worth it. We could have had a cease-fire a long time ago. Now you watch, son, in a year's time they'll be back fighting again somewhere else. I just don't know why."

When Mrs. Pittman called Washington to inquire about her son, a man said, "This happens every day."

Then an Army sergeant arrived to say that their son had died in a California hospital. He is buried with most of the other dead from Beallsville up in the cemetery overlooking the high school and its football field.

Now, his picture in his football uniform, along with his basketball trophies and varsity letters, stand in a trophy case in the Pittman living room.

Mr. Pittman recently sold his peach and apple orchard. "Why not?" Mrs. Pittman asked. "We have no boy to leave it to."

#### The Last Straw

Three years after young Pittman's death an enemy sniper shot and killed Beallsville's Robert Lucas, a medical corpsman, as he tended a wounded Marine. That incident, in March 1968, was the last straw for this town.

Raymond Starkey, Monroe County Treasurer, and Keith Harper, the town undertaker, asked the Department of Defense to keep any more Beallsville boys from serving in Vietnam.

The request was turned down, which prompted some more bitterness about a military draft system that then exempted college students,