

## His Name May Not Be Mentioned

# Missing Pilot's Wife Faces

By EVERETT R. HOLLES

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SAN DIEGO — For the families of nearly 600 Americans who have been prisoners of war in Indochina this is a time of rejoicing and planning for their homecoming, but not for pretty Jan Dodge.

She still is praying and clutching the thin thread of hope that has sustained her through nearly six years of waiting and wondering since her husband, a Navy fighter pilot, was shot down over the southern coastal region of North Vietnam.

For her, and for the wives and families of 1,340 other Americans listed as missing in action, the ending of the war is only the beginning of a new ordeal of anguish.

Their moment of truth will come Saturday at the formal signing of the cease-fire protocol in Paris when both sides will exchange lists of the men they hold prisoner, or who have died while in captivity.

"IT'S WONDERFUL, the end of this terrible war, but for many of us it is the most difficult time of all," said Mrs. Dodge, whose husband, Lt. Cmdr. Ronald Dodge, then 31, parachuted from his crippled P-8 Crusader fighter on May 17, 1967.

"I've waited so long for the war to end, but now I'm afraid."

If his name is not on Hanoi's list of prisoners to be returned, then she wants it to be on the list of those who have died since falling into enemy hands "because I cannot go on not knowing."

Mrs. Dodge is one of some 200 wives who have pinned their hopes on evidence indicating their husbands were captured alive, even though their capture never has been acknowledged by the North Vietnamese nor have their deaths been reported. Most of them are listed by the Pentagon as missing in action.

THE LAST WORD from Dodge came over his survival radio to fellow pilots overhead, a few minutes after he

had parachuted to earth:

"I am surrounded . . . I am breaking up my radio . . . I'm moving up the hill."

Since then Mrs. Dodge has had no letters from him and the Christmas packages which she sent each year until two years ago were returned.

But four months after Dodge's disappearance, the Paris Match published a full-page photo of American prisoners being marched through Hanoi and Mrs. Dodge identified one of the wounded men as her husband.

A YEAR AGO, at Miramar Naval Air Station here, Mrs. Dodge sat in a darkened room and watched the screening of a scratchy bit of motion picture film that showed a tall U.S. Navy pilot in the custody of North Vietnamese soldiers, his head bandaged and his bloodied left hand tightened in a defiant fist.

"That's him, that's my husband Ronald," she said quietly.

In May, 1971, Jan Dodge left her children, Wendy, 11, and Brad, 9, with her parents in Palm Springs and set out on a quest that took her to Washington, France and Holland in a confrontation with the senior North Vietnamese negotiator at the Paris peace talks.

When she finally gained access to the North Vietnamese delegate, she showed him the Paris Match photo and demanded he confirm her husband's capture.

"HE WAS TOTALLY annoyed and insisted that Hanoi's announced list of American prisoners was complete," she related.

Hanoi in the past has acknowledged holding less than 400 Americans as prisoners in North Vietnam and has identi-

fied 20 others as having died in captivity.

Mrs. Dodge then sought out the editors of Paris Match, who told her the photo in their Sept. 9, 1967, issue was purchased from a Dutch press photographer, Jaris Ivens.

She went to Holland and found Ivens, but he denied taking the photograph. She believed it actually was an official North Vietnamese government photograph obtained by the Paris publication from Hanoi.

"THERE IS plenty of evidence, in the photograph and in the motion picture clip, that my husband was alive and able to walk after he was

captured," Mrs. Dodge said. "If he is not among the prisoners to be released then he died while in North Vietnamese hands and under the terms of the cease-fire they are obligated to report this fact."

President Nixon, announcing the cease-fire agreement, said the North Vietnamese had promised "the fullest possible accounting of the missing."

Mrs. Dodge, like all the other wives and families of American war prisoners and men missing in action, received a letter from Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird last fall assuring her that "we will continue by every possible channel to obtain information

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## Another Ordeal

about our missing men who may not be returned."

This effort to obtain information on the missing may involve "additional initiatives," it was said, including the questioning of returned prisoners, further negotiation with the North Vietnamese, impartial inspection, sight investigation and the use of graves registration teams.

"UNTIL SATURDAY and the release of the prisoner list, all I can do is continue to hope and pray," Mrs. Dodge said wistfully.

But even if her husband's name does not appear as a prisoner or among those who have died in captivity she will

cling to her fragile remnant of hope.

"Whatever happens Saturday perhaps someone among the first groups of prisoners to be returned home may be able to tell me something about my husband," she said.