



The New York Times/Mike Lien

Mrs. Carroll E. Flora Jr. in her home in Walkersville, Md., with children Dwane, 6, and Teresa, 14. With her are Sgt. 1st Cl. Flora's grandmother, Mrs. Lucille Anders, and mother, Mrs. Frances Flora. Other relatives were on hand to celebrate, also.

Long Wait Over for 1,925 U.S. Families

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By STEVEN V. ROBERTS

Jo Anne Flora has been waiting for six years. Her husband, Sgt. 1st Cl. Carroll E. Flora Jr., was listed as missing after he fell from a medical evacuation helicopter near the Demilitarized Zone and disappeared.

Mrs. Flora has never heard a word from him. Saturday night at her home in Walkersville, Md., a casualty assistance officer came to her door at about 11 and asked her whether she had anything in the house to drink.

"Why?" she asked. "Do I have

A listing of war prisoners will be found on Page 16.

something to celebrate?" "You sure do," replied the officer, "Eddie is on the list."

He was referring to the list of 555 American military prisoners in North and South Vietnam who will be released in the next two months. The list, which was handed over to United States officials in Paris by the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong, was gradually made public yesterday as next of kin were notified.

Dramas were played out

across the country over the weekend as 1,925 families learned whether their husbands, fathers and sons were identified captives or were still lost somewhere in the jungles of Indochina.

Thousands of miles away from Mrs. Flora's home in Azusa, Calif., Patty Hardy had been waiting even longer for a phone call, and Saturday night she got it.

Her husband, Capt. John K. Hardy, has been listed as missing in action since his plane

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The New York Times/D. Gorton

Mrs. John K. Hardy holding her daughter Mary Pat yesterday morning in their home in Azusa, Calif.

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was shot down on a night reconnaissance flight over North Vietnam. Captain Hardy's name, the caller said, was not on the list.

"It's over, I guess," Mrs. Hardy said yesterday morning, as she managed a weak smile. "It will be so good to get involved in something else."

For a few, like Jo Anne Flora, their stubborn hope for a miracle has been fulfilled. For many, the weekend marked the end of a long and frustrating time, the end of doubt, the end of hope.

Mrs. Evelyn Grubb, whose husband was taken prisoner in 1966 but apparently died in captivity, put it this way: "I keep saying that this is the first day of the rest of my life."

The waiting is not quite over. Many families, whose loved ones are not on the list, still feel a rather desperate need to know what exactly happened to them.

In the hours before she heard the good news, Mrs. Flora talked about this need: "If he's not on the list, O.K., somebody find out what happened. How can I say to my kids, 'Your father just disappeared.'"

But even after the returning prisoners are debriefed, and after American teams have been allowed to check grave sites in Communist-held territory, many questions will remain unanswered.

"In no way can many of our men be accounted for, just no way," said Mrs. Iris Powers, a founder of the National League of Families and the mother of a missing helicopter pilot who is apparently dead.

"I've been trying to psych myself up for this day for the past two or three years," Mrs. Powers added. "The thing that's hurting me so deeply are the families I know who have not done this. They have lived with that faith and hope that their men are coming home. My God, what those families are going through."

Much Trepidation

Many families had approached the weekend with trepidation. They were afraid to know the truth. But no Jo Anne Flora.

"It's been six years, I want to know," she said Friday over the telephone. "It's been very hard living day to day. I can't make any plans for the future. We deserve to know whether we have a husband and a father coming home, or if we have to pick up the pieces and start over."

"One part of me tells me he's alive," she added. "I know in reality it's been five years, and I've had nothing to go on, but in my heart I have a stubborn feeling he's survived."

After Sergeant Flora disappeared, his wife plunged into work with the National League

of Families, but last year, she eased off her activity.

"I've been at loose ends, one hobby after another," Mrs. Flora, who is 36 years old, said. "I've been trying to fill in that void and I still haven't found anything to fill it. I work in the yard, or around the house, but it's a more or less day-to-day thing. Each day I have to find something to keep me going for that day."

By Friday, the tension had reached such a pitch in the Flora home that Jo Anne was looking for work.

"I tore my son's room apart," she said with a laugh. "I'm going to paint it. I know that sounds crazy, but as long as I keep my hands busy..."

After the News...

After the good news came, Mrs. Flora's 14-year-old daughter jumped up and down, laughing and crying. Mrs. Flora's 6-year-old son had gone to bed asking, "When is my daddy coming home?"

As she had so many times, Mrs. Flora tried to tell the child that his father might never come home. But when she finally had an answer for him, the boy could not be awakened out of his deep sleep and had to wait till morning for the news.

Neighbors and friends filled the house that Mrs. Flora bought after her husband went down. Many pots of coffee later, the last well-wishers left at 4:30 in the morning.

During another phone call several hours after that, Mrs. Flora pronounced herself "ecstatic," despite her sleepless night. What next?

"I'll wait for that phone call as soon as he is released," she said. "Then my bags will be packed and I'll be on my way, wherever they send him."

Released prisoners will be allowed to call home when they reach the Philippines and then will be sent to military hospitals near their home.

"As for making plans, we'll have to play it by ear," Mrs. Flora said. "I've been too busy just telling people he's alive."

"In nine years of marriage we've never spent an anniversary together," she went on. "The next one is on March 6, and I'm hoping we'll spend this one together."

Eddie Flora will be coming home to many changes. There is the new house he has never seen. His sister, 13 when he left, is married and the mother of two. Dwayne Flora was 10 when his father last saw him. Mr. Flora's stepdaughter, only 8 when he went away, is now taller than her mother.

The Biggest Changes

Perhaps the biggest changes have come in Jo Anne Flora.

As she put it: "When Eddie left I was content to sit home and take care of the kids and cook. I've gotten out into the world, I've learned a lot of things, I ask questions now, I'm not anxious to accept what's going on. A friend of

mine said "You're so damned independent, how are you going to readjust?"

Mrs. Flora remembered the day her husband left almost six years ago.

"He said, 'I may not be back when I'm supposed to be, but I'll be back,'" she recalled. "I never thought it would take this long, but I'm here waiting. I've never stopped waiting."

Patty Hardy never stopped waiting, either. When Jack Hardy went to war, his young wife and two small daughters moved back home, to Azusa, a small suburb east of Los Angeles. Six months later, his plane was hit by enemy fire and apparently exploded in mid-air. Mrs. Hardy realized his chances were slim, but never quite gave up hope.

After several years, she quit her job as a nurse and got involved in the campaign to publicize the plight of missing and captive soldiers. With two other wives, she traveled around the world on a five-week trip, seeking information, in vain, about her husband.

Over the weekend, as she waits for news from Paris, she sat in the toy-strewn living room of her small bungalow, and talked about her vigil.

"It's hard to comprehend," said the slim, freckled-faced woman. "It's like ordering a pair of shoe laces or something, and you know that someone is going to call and tell you they came in. It doesn't make sense."

"I have tried to prepare my-

self for the fact that he's not coming home, but right now I can't deny that I still have hope. I keep switching back and forth. I think about what we'll do when he does come home, and then I think, what if he doesn't. It's a very unnatural thing."

Like Jo Ann Flora, Patty Hardy could not wait anymore.

"I want to know, I've had it," she said. "I've got to know, I've just got to know."

As the hours dragged by, she talked to friends, worked on her needlepoint, went to the supermarket.

"People think everything should stop," she said. "But life goes on, the kids still get hungry."

Finally, the call came at about 9 Saturday night. An hour later, she had a visit from one of her husband's old flying buddies, who talked to the girls—Mary Pat, 8, and Megan, 6—about their father.

Yesterday morning, looking solemn but composed, her blond hair pulled back and curled into a pageboy, Mrs. Hardy told a visitor: "I feel tremendous relief. A horrible burden has been lifted, and I'm able to make some plans. I haven't been able to do that."

She was "furious" that the Vietnamese had supplied no information about her husband—only that he was not held captive—but she accepted the verdict.

"The thing that bothers you, is that he has been dead all these years," she said. "All those years of hoping and waiting, and he was dead. It doesn't seem fair, but things aren't fair."

Her children laughed and played with a friend, feeding cereal to a stuffed animal.

'Not a Loss'

"Nothing's changed for them, it's the same as last week," she said. "It's a big disappointment, but not a loss."

"When Jack first went down," Mrs. Hardy went on, "I felt terrible that the children when I see what older children have had to endure in other families—they had memories and they had a hard time. They're much more confused than my children, and as badly as I feel about them not remembering Jack, I think in the long run it's probably best."

Thinking of her own future,

Patty Hardy wants to go back to school.

"I want to get a degree in business and combine it with my nursing," she said. "I want to have a super job, make good money, be a Girl Scout leader, take a nice vacation with the kids and get a cleaning lady."

Mrs. Hardy, 30, wonders about marrying again.

"I've had the opportunity to sit back and look at friends and think about who I'd like to trade with," she said. "There are not that many happy people. I'd be much better off alone than in an unhappy marriage."

In her sadness, Patty Hardy remembers the good things.

"Jack was very happy doing exactly what he thought was best," she said.

"He loved flying and he loved his family. He was 26 when he died, but some people live to be 60 and can never say that. How can I feel terrible about that? Well, I do, of course, I feel rotten that I'll never get to be a little old lady, sitting in a rocking chair next to him. But what if he had never had any of that at all?"