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Lieut. Col. William B. Nolde of Mount Pleasant, Mich.

An Army Colonel From Michigan Is Last American to Die in War

By JERRY M. FLINT

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DETROIT, Jan. 28—Lieut. Col. William B. Nolde, 43, of Mount Pleasant, Mich., was identified by the Pentagon today as the last American to die in the Vietnam war.

His death from an artillery shell at An Loc made the unofficial toll of United States personnel killed in the war 45,997. He died just 11 hours before the truce took effect.

"I knew he wasn't coming back. I knew it the other night," his wife, Joyce, said.

"I had a dream," Mrs. Nolde said today in a telephone interview from Onaway, Mich. "A rocket came in."

There was reason for some

worry. Her husband had written that a captured prisoner had told of a big push to come just before the expected truce. Mrs. Nolde said that in the dream, "he said, 'Don't worry honey, I'm all right,' and turned, and there was an explosion."

She said she had told the children to be prepared because she had a feeling "Dad's gone." Last evening an Army officer went to Mount Pleasant, where Mrs. Nolde and her five children live, and told them that Colonel Nolde was dead, and then she went from the quiet mid-Michigan town to Onaway, at the tip of Michigan's

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Lower Peninsula, to be with her family.

The last American soldier to die in Vietnam had come from Menominee, a little city in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. He was a career Army man and loved it. His friends and wife said that he was proud to be in Vietnam because he thought he could help the Vietnamese people.

'Things Are Fine'

In a letter to a friend, Theodore Cook, who teaches chemistry at Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Colonel Nolde said:

"Things are fine with me here. I don't really know any more than what you read as to the possibilities of a truce soon. We are hopeful for the sake of the Vietnamese people. Particularly I would so much like to see peace finally arrive, providing it was a reasonable agreement and they didn't lose that which

so many of them have given so much for.

"We tend to think only in terms of what this war has cost us, the United States, but by comparison to what it has cost so many Vietnamese, our price pales. I worry much about them. I am intimately familiar with the plight of the Binh Long [Province] population. Most of them are sitting in war victims' camps waiting the time they come back here to what had been their homes. We do the best we can in providing the bare necessities of life while they are in camp, but their life has not been a pleasant one.

"What the terms any cease-fire will hold for them is a big question mark. They ask me that question, but I have no answers. Well, enough of that. Time will provide some answers to much of this, I guess."

Confidence and Compassion

Mrs. Nolde said today that she had no bitterness. "I can't feel bitter because the war has ended," she said. "That's what he wanted."

The five Nolde children are Blair, 19, a student at Central Michigan; Brent, 17; Kimberle, 16; Byron, 14, and Bart, 13.

That blend of American confidence and compassion that led the nation into the war seemed present in Colonel Nolde.

"He cared very much for the people, especially the children," his widow said. "He felt he was doing a good thing there."

He was the senior American adviser in his province, and an American friend said that he did not believe that the realities of the war were reflected accurately in the news reports that were sent to the United States.

"He drove all over Binh Long Province in his jeep encouraging the people to go back and put the pieces of their city together again," said Robert Walkinshaw in Vietnam. Mr. Walkinshaw is the pacification chief for the military region around An Loc and was a friend of Colonel Nolde.

An Loc, once a pretty city,

moonscape of rubble and dust after its long and successful battle against invading North Vietnamese.

"But Bill loved that place," Mr. Walkinshaw said. "He was always getting together with a Catholic priest on how to rebuild the church, and hardly a week went by that he did not run over to the refugee camp at Phu Van in the neighboring province to see how the people were making out whom the war had driven from their homes."

Colonel Nolde was a Roman Catholic, and his wife is Protestant. The children have been raised as Catholics.

"He believed in what he was doing. The family was with him," Mrs. Nolde said. "We believe in God, country, family. I feel sorry for people who don't know where they're going."

The family had not been together much, perhaps 30 days or so, in the last five years, she said.

The Noldes met when both were teaching in Newberry, another upper peninsula town. Then came the Korean War, and he was drafted. He then went to officers' candidate school and he stayed in the Army. The family came to Mount Pleasant in the early nineteen-sixties when the officer became the Reserve Officers Training Corps instructor at Central Michigan. Then came a year in Vietnam, and posts in Kansas and Virginia.

The family decided to put down roots in Mount Pleasant because the children were approaching their teens, Mrs. Nolde said.

The husband and father went to Italy for two years while the family remained in the Michigan town. Then he spent six months in Washington, and a 30-day leave at home was cut to 10 days by an emergency call to return to Vietnam. That was the last time he spent with his family.

A friend, Frank Demski, said today that Colonel Nolde had said that being in Vietnam would help bring peace to the Vietnamese people and that it could help others to