

Day of Drama for MIA Families

By John Sarr

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The long years of desperate hope and enforced patience ended yesterday in a tumult of emotion for relatives in the District, Maryland and Virginia of Americans captured and missing in the Vietnam War.

In a day of personal drama and tension unparalleled since the release of Korean War prisoners, joy and sorrow frequently went hand in hand.

As military officers called on the families to say that, according to the official North Vietnamese list, a son, or husband, or brother was or was not coming home, news sped back and forth across the POW-MIA network of families in the area.

Some of the telephone calls were congratulatory. But many calls of sympathy and sorrow, due to the non-appearance of an MIA man's name on the prisoner list.

For the few families in the metropolitan Area who learned positively of a POW's impending release, relief and happiness were restrained by the bitter disappointment suffered by others.

Two wives, Bonnie Metzger and Judy Irsch spent one of the longest days of their lives waiting together for news from the Pentagon. When it came, Mrs. Metzger of 4453 Forest Glen Court, Annandale, learned that her Navy flier husband would be home soon. Mrs. Irsch was told her husband, Air Force Capt. Wayne Irsch, was not on the list.

Mrs. Metzger, whose husband, Lt. William J. Metzger Jr., was shot down over Hanoi in May, 1967, said, "I feel superhappy, not surprised, because I have had letters and knew he was alive. But this is one step closer.

"I am suffering some form of guilt, I suppose, because I'm so lucky, but until the full list comes out there's still a chance for others."

Soon after she got news of her own husband's safety, Libby Hill, 6441 Wakefield Dr., Alexandria, called a friend in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, where 26 wives of MIAs live.

"Not one of them had heard her husband was coming back and they were very, very downhearted," Mrs. Hill said.

Mrs. Hill's husband, Air Force Capt. Howard J. Hill, was shot down over North Vietnam in December, 1967. "Before he went to Indochina I'd only been married to Howard 12 days and known him for only a few short months before that," she recalled yesterday. "Over the years those other missing husbands became almost as important to me."

"Much as I wanted every man to come home I knew they wouldn't. But I thought it would be at least 700-800."

Until midnight Saturday, Mr. and Mrs. W.A. Hoffson had heard no word from their son, Air Force Capt. Arthur T. Hoffson, who was shot down over North Vietnam, for almost a year. Then they got a call from an officer at Andrews Air Force Base. "He told us he

had good news," said Mrs. Hoffson, who lives in Camp Springs, Md. "It was a great relief. We celebrated very quietly, very thankfully and with a small prayer that he's coming home safely."

The published list included very few of the men previously posted as missing by the U.S. Since Col. Bobbie G. Vinson's Air Force F4 went down in April, 1968, Mrs. Joan Vinson, 2607 Childs La., Alexandria, has encouraged their four children "to live with the hope he is alive and the realization he may very well be dead."

On Saturday she felt sure they would find out, and three of the children, Lauri, 9, Vicki, 14, and Robbie, 16, were at her side as she waited through a day of mounting tension.

"I felt all the missing people would be listed and identified. That, good or bad, there would be something positive, and we wanted something to remember it by," Mrs. Vinson said yesterday. "I was ready to tell the children anything and everything to put things in perspective—about our involvement in the war and about their father."

"I was all psyched up to make a determination, that I'd have something to tell the children. It turned out we know no more than we knew yesterday, or five years ago. As we waited for the names to come out Lauri was asking, 'Do you think they will spell his name right?' and, 'Vinson will come very late, near the end because its close to W.' It was one of the most agonizing days of all the years. All the hurt and anxiety concentrated and came back."

Another wife left uncertain about her husband's fate was Melissa Hogan, 2192 Iroquois Ln., Falls Church.

Lt.(jg) Jerry F. Hogan has not been heard from since his A4 fighter went down during a night mission over North Vietnam in January, 1967. "I decided that after waiting six years if I started clocking time now I would go out of my mind. So I went to a cocktail party and

when I got back I was notified my husband wasn't on the list," Mrs. Hogan said.

"I think he is dead but I don't totally accept or believe it," she said. "Until I am told with some credibility, I owe him too much to give up hope. He said when he left that if anything happened he knew I was the kind of person who would carry on and make him proud. That's what I'm going to do."

Others with relatives still missing were ready to continue clinging to the faintest hope. Alexander C. Ducat, 8105 Custer Rd., Bethesda, was told by an Air Force chaplain and two other officers that his son, Capt. Bruce C. Ducat, who has been missing since his airplane was downed in 1966 over North Vietnam, was unlisted.

"We have not given up hope yet and his status will continue as missing," Mr. Ducat said. "He didn't just vanish into thin air; there's something that doesn't add up. Until someone explains to me I shall go on believing he's around someplace."

Navy Lt. Charles C. Parish was flying a Phantom when he was hit over Vinh, North Vietnam, July 25th, 1968. He remains listed as missing in action. His sister, Barbara Ondrasik of 4311 Joplin Drive, Rockville, says, "My mother still hopes for a miracle, but it looks like Chuck didn't have time to get out."

"His wife was very active in getting the League of Prisoners' Families started and she went to Congress, the U.N. and the Paris peace talks before she found out that North Vietnam denied holding him prisoner. She remarried recently and I know she only did it because she was certain he perished in the crash."

With the first batch of prisoners due back in 10 days or so, the lucky families are preparing homecomings. Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Moe, 130 S. Columbus St., Arlington, plan a quiet family re-entry for their son, Capt. Thomas Moe, who was shot down in an Air Force F-4 in January, 1968.

"We have friends calling every five minutes so we'll have to celebrate this thing real well," said Moe. "Of course it will depend on his physical condition, we know his mind and morale are fine."

Separated for five years after only 12 days of married life, Libby Hill faces the problems of getting reacquainted with her husband with a blend of confidence and trepidation: "I have 17 beautiful letters from Howard and I think once he gets back everything will fall into place."

Following is a partial list of the names of prisoners from Washington, Virginia and Maryland:

VIRGINIA AIR FORCE

Mai. James R. Berger, 35, Lexington.

ARMY

Mai. Floyd H. Kushner, 32, Danville; S. Sgt. Julius W. Long, Jr., 29, Pulaski.

NAVY

Capt. Allen C. Brady, 43, Virginia Beach; Lt. Cmdr. Michael D. Christian, 32, Virginia Beach; Cmdr. Kenneth L. Coskey, 43, Virginia Beach; Cmdr. John H. Fellowes, 40, Virginia Beach; Col. Kenneth R. Fleenor, 43, Hampton; Lt. Cmdr. Paul E. Galanti, 33, Richmond; Cmdr. Eugene B. McDaniel, 42, Virginia Beach; Capt. James A. Mulligan, 46, Virginia Beach; Capt. Wendell B. Rivers, 43, Alexandria; Lt. Cmdr. Theodore W. Triebel, 32, Vienna; Lt. Cmdr. William M. Tschudy, 37, Virginia Beach.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA AIR FORCE

Capt. Arthur T. Hoffman, 29, Washington; Mai. George G. McKnight, 39, Washington.

MARYLAND NAVY

Cmdr. Hugh A. Stafford, 38, Cambridge; Cmdr. James F. Bell, 41, LaVale.

German Group Asks Break With U.S.

DUISBURG, West Germany, Jan. 28—The Young Democrats, youth organization of Foreign Minister Walter Scheel's Free Democratic party, today adopted a motion asking West Germany to renounce its alliance with the United States.

The group said that the government could no longer defend an alliance which obliged it to tolerate and approve a "criminal war" like the one in Indochina. They said that the Vietnam cease-fire changes nothing in their basic position.