

A Marine Returns From the Officially Dead

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 30 — A presumed dead by the Defense marine private who was believed to have been killed in the battle of Khe Sanh in 1968 and buried in a military cemetery in St. Louis has turned up alive as a prisoner of war held by the Vietcong in South Vietnam.

The Defense Department announced today that the name of the marine, Pfc. Ronald L. Ridgeway of Houston, appeared on a list of prisoners supplied by the Communist side last Saturday.

Private Ridgeway had been



Associated Press
Pfc. Ronald L. Ridgeway

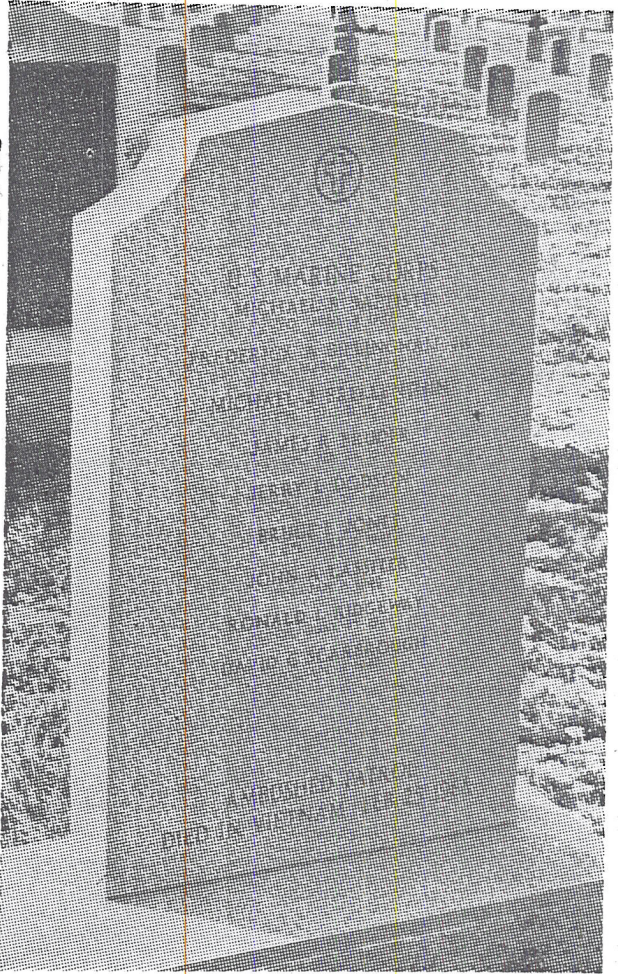
Department for nearly five years after his patrol was ambushed near Khe Sanh in February, 1968. What was believed to be his body, along with those of eight other members of the patrol who were killed in the ambush, was buried in a group grave in the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis.

In Houston, Mrs. Mildred A. Ridgeway, a nurse's aide in the Parkway Hospital, told reporters: "I always had a feeling my son would turn up alive."

Mrs. Ridgeway, who was notified Sunday by the Marine Corps that her son was alive, said, "I never gave in to the fact that my son was dead. It was faith in God."

"My sympathy goes to the parents of the boy we buried because I shed quite a few tears for him," she added.

The return of Private Ridgeway from the ranks of the officially dead provided the most dramatic personal chapter thus far in the prisoner exchange arranged under the



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Stone lists Pfc. Ridgeway among nine buried in grave

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Vietnam peace agreement.

Of the 555 prisoners named in the Communist lists, 45 had previously been listed as missing in action. One, a marine, had been carried as a deserter. But Private Ridgeway was the only one who had been listed as killed in action.

The announcement that Private Ridgeway was still alive was made by Maj. Gen. Daniel James, a Pentagon spokesman, at the Defense Department's daily press briefing.

In a four-paragraph statement, the Defense Department said that the prisoner lists contained the name of Private Ridgeway and that "the name and personal data correspond with Marine records on Ridgeway, who had been determined to be dead with remains recovered and returned to the United States for burial."

The Defense Department at first said the list had been supplied by North Vietnam, but it subsequently said the name was on "the lists of prisoners of war released by the other side."

This indicated that Private Ridgeway was among the prisoners whom the Vietcong say they hold. North Vietnam and the Vietcong supplied separate lists in Paris last Saturday.

The list said that Private Ridgeway was captured Feb. 25, 1968. That was the same day that the nine-man patrol was ambushed and apparently wiped out.

According to General James, nine bodies were apparently sighted by an air patrol at the site of the ambush. Because of the fighting in the area, however, it was impossible to recover the bodies immediately. At the time, Khe Sanh, an isolated base in the northwestern section of South Vietnam, was under siege and bombardment.

Private Ridgeway and other members of the patrol were initially carried as missing in action. It was not until Aug. 15, 1968, that the remains were found in the ambush area by a ground patrol.

The remains were later identified, according to the Defense Department, as the bodies of the nine members of the patrol. But the announcement said that "positive individual identification of some partial remains was impossible."

"The area had undergone intense bombardment, and the remains were deteriorated



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Mrs. Mildred A. Ridgeway, mother of Pfc. Ronald L. Ridgeway, in Houston.

from the tropical environment," the announcement said.

The St. Louis cemetery was chosen for the group burial because it was most convenient for the families.

Private Ridgeway's father, Louis M. Ridgeway of Lake Run A Muck, near Shepherd, Tex., said he, too, had always believed his son was still alive.

"They never gave me any proof," the father, a railroad worker, told reporters. "They never had identification. His dog tags were never found, and that's what got me to believe he was never dead."

Mrs. Ridgeway said she was awakened at 1:15 A.M. Sunday by a Marine Corps Officer. As soon as the officer had identified himself, she continued, "I said, 'It's my son. He's alive, isn't he?'"

"I stayed awake all night following the call," she said.

Ever since the funeral, which she attended, Mrs. Ridgeway said, "I have spent many sorrowful hours, but I always had the feeling my son would turn up."

The Ridgeways were divorced in 1965, and the son continued to live with his mother in Houston. At the age of 17, Roland Ridgeway left the Sam Houston High School in his senior year to enlist in the Marine Corps in June, 1967. Four months later, after basic training, he was sent to Vietnam.

REMEMBER THE NEEDLES!