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The Joyous,

Long-Awaited Phone Calls

New York
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Releasing the emotions held in check through long years of false peace reports and months of supposedly last-minute delays, the men's relatives screamed, wept and laughed. Many watched telecasts of

the arrival of the returnees at Clark Air Base in the Philippines. Later, they waited for long-distance calls from husbands, brothers and sons.

When Navy Lieutenant Kenneth H. Higdon called his wife, who's visiting her mother in Texas yesterday morning, he told her that he had received the best birthday present of his life on January 29, the day he was told he would be freed.

Mrs. Higdon is expecting a baby in May and does not wish to speak to the press,

the lieutenant's mother, Jeannie (Mrs. Hill) Higdon of San Francisco, told The Chronicle yesterday. However, she summarized the lieutenant's conversation with his wife.

"His first question was 'How's my mother?'" Mrs. Higdon reported. "As a mother I felt there was something wrong with him, since they were putting him on the first plane and I guess my instinct was right," she said describing an injury involving severed

tendons that Lieutenant Higdon disclosed to his wife.

"Be sure to tell them America's a great country and I'm proud to be an American. People just don't realize what they have until they've lost it."

Delia said Alvarez was in good shape and about the same weight as when he was captured.

"I asked him not to cut his hair because he looks so well," said his sister. "He said he had a mustache but shaved it off when he heard he was being released."

Alvarez' former wife, Tangee (she has declined to give her name) married him

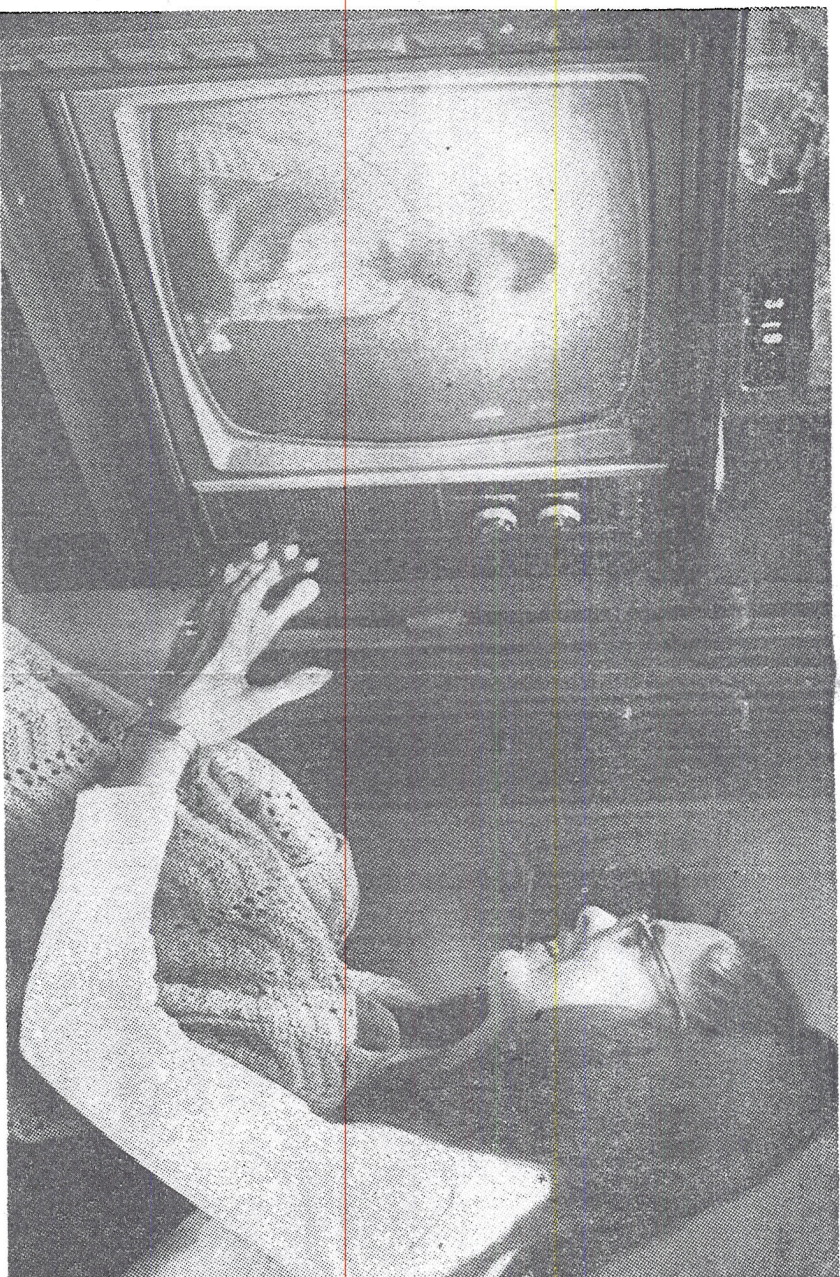
the phone, but the conversation was strictly between husband and wife.

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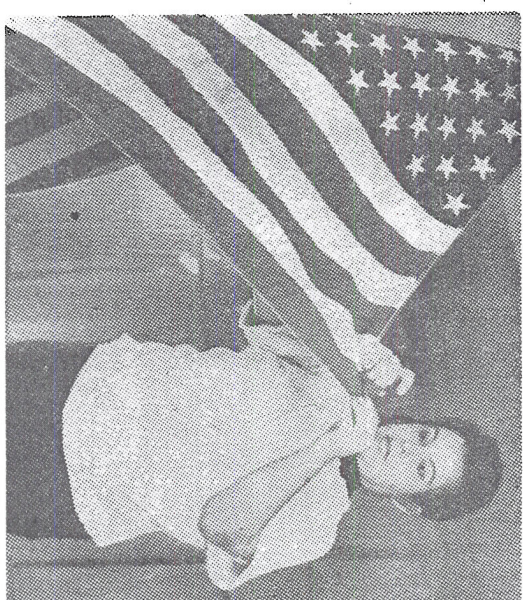
"Let's be nice to everybody now," she said between sobs.

When Mrs. Joy Jeffrey of Dallas spotted her husband, Air Force Major Robert D. Jeffrey, on television, the cameraman quickly focused on another returnee.

"Go back, go back," she pleaded to the camera.



Mrs. Robert Jeffrey reached out in joy yesterday as she got the first glimpse of her husband, an Air Force major, in more than seven years.



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His father, Hill Higdon, said he was "so relieved I took a tranquilizer" and stayed in bed most of the day."

About 9:30 last night, the Alvarez family of San Jose received a call from Lieutenant Commander Everett Alvarez Jr. "He'd been so bogged down with all the things they have to do that he hadn't had a chance to call earlier," his sister, Delia said.

"He's not sure when he'll be coming in, but we asked him to try to be on the plane if one comes in on Thursday and he said he would. We'll be at Travis to meet him, which surprised him — I guess he didn't know that we could."

Delia said that during the 30-minute conversation Alvarez expressed amazement that he has become a national figure and was shown on television arriving at Clark on the first plane from Hanoi. She said Alvarez told her:

"Be sure to tell them America's a great country and I'm proud to be an American. People just don't realize what they have until they've lost it."

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Alvarez' former wife, Tangee (she has declined to give her new married name), who remarried during his imprisonment, will not be here for the homecoming. However, the Alvarez family did receive a note from her. It said, "You are in my prayers."

"Baby, I read you fine. Everything is fine," Mrs. Robert Purcell of Louisville, Ky., told her husband, an Air Force lieutenant colonel shot down near Hanoi on July 25, 1965.

There had been an erroneous report from military authorities that Purcell would not come home, that he had given up his place to another prisoner whose mother is seriously ill. Both made the trip from Hanoi, however, and Mrs. Purcell spotted her husband in a television broadcast.

"There he is," the five Purcell children shrieked each time he appeared on the screen.

The children crowded around while their mother talked with their father on

the phone, but the conversation was strictly between husband and wife.

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"Let's be nice to everybody now," she said between sobs.

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"Go back, go back," she pleaded to the camera.

"I know we're going to have to be patient," she said, referring to the readjustment facing Jeffrey, who was a POW since 1965. "We're going to have to give a lot of ourselves. It's going to take some time, but it will be the happiest job of readjusting I've ever done."

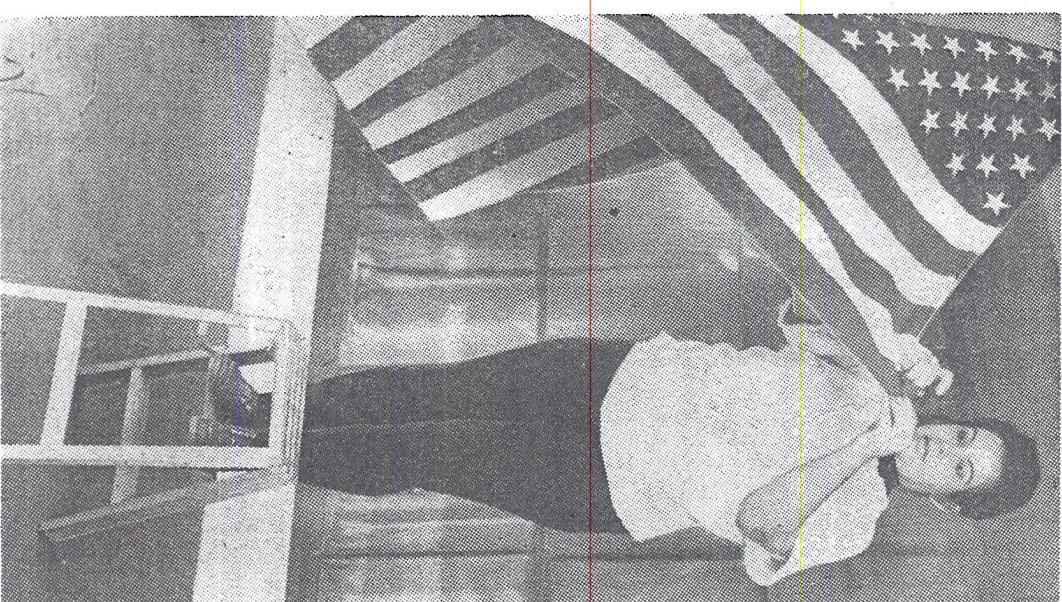
Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Alan P. Lurie, shot down in 1966, quipped, "A funny thing happened to me on the way to North Vietnam."

"He sounded like he left yesterday and was stranded overnight by bad weather," Mary Lurie said after speaking to her husband at her home in Apple Valley, Calif.

The brother of Navy Lieutenant David G. Rehmann, of Lancaster, Calif., looked to the future. "We are going to be forced to go real easy on him," Tom Rehmann said. "It's pretty hard to throw a steak dinner at someone who has been living off pig fat and pumpkin soup for the past six years." A.P. & U.P.



The Hill Higdon of San Francisco watched their son on TV last night



LPI Telephone

Mrs. Misty Caughen, a neighbor of returnee Everett Alvarez Jr., prepared to hang a flag outside her home to welcome him