

Group Selling P.O.W. Bracelets in New Crusade

By EVERETT R. HOLLES
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LOS ANGELES, Feb. 25 — When Capt. John Nasmyth Jr. landed last week after years of captivity, a dozen strangers rushed up to him and thrust into his hands metal bracelets bearing his name.

The strangers had been wearing the bracelets for as long as two years or more, as amulets of their concern and their faith in his safe return.

One was a 16-year-old high school girl, crying and laughing at the same time. She had tied a red rosebud to her bracelet before giving it to the 32-year-old Air Force officer, a San Gabriel man who was a prisoner for six and a half years.

An old man with a severe limp apologized because his bracelet had become badly scratched and dented since he put it on 18 months ago, vowing not to remove it until Captain Nasmyth was home again.

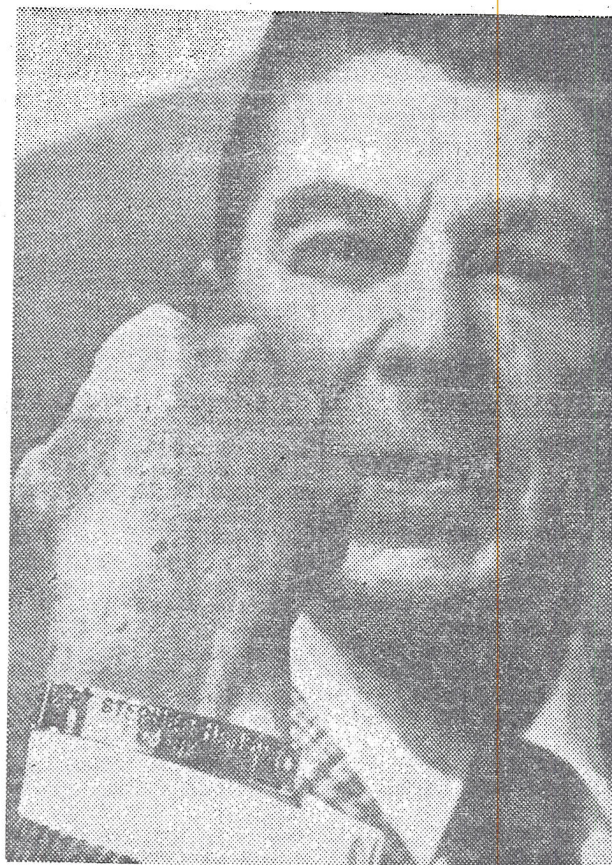
Project of Organization

Scenes like this one at March Air Force Base have been played many times in recent days at the homecomings of American prisoners of war.

More than five million Americans, including most of the wives and family members of 1,900 American prisoners of war and men missing in action, have been wearing the bracelets—either stainless steel or copper—inscribed with a man's name and the date he was captured or reported missing.

The bracelets were produced and distributed by a nonprofit organization. Voices in Vital America, based in Los Angeles with nine branch offices around the country and functioning with all the professionalism of a large mail-order corporation.

With a paid staff of slightly more than 100 assisted by many volunteers, VIVA serves 45 other organizations in 73 cities,



Associated Press

Gov. Ronald Reagan of California showing bracelet with the name of Marine Capt. Stephen Hanson, missing in Laos. Bracelets are made by Voices in Vital America.

many of them small family groups that depend on it for money and literature and other promotional materials. Altogether, VIVA boasts of 45,000 volunteer workers.

Last year VIVA took in \$3,693,661, almost entirely from sales of the bracelets. Each bracelet costs a little less than 50 cents and sells to the public at \$2.50 or \$3 for the copper ones, which some wearers believe possess medicinal powers.

The profits have gone to produce millions of brochures, bumper stickers, matchbooks, newspaper advertisements and a wide variety of other items and educational activities—all aimed at keeping the plight of the prisoners and the missing a topic of prime national concern.

VIVA also helped finance direct-mail campaigns by smaller groups to bring pressure on the Administration and Congress to obtain release of the

prisoners and missing.

Since the truce and the prisoner homecomings, sales of the bracelets have fallen off "but not to the extent that might have been expected," said John M. Schweizer Jr., VIVA's executive director and a retired Air Force general.

"In fact, we think the sales of bracelets with the names of those still missing may pick up now," he added.

Mrs. Douglas Coppin, a Los Angeles woman who organized VIVA six years ago as a volunteer group, says the organization, far from thinking about closing up shop, is embarking on a new crusade.

Full-Page Ads Run

Full-page advertisements are being run in 140 newspapers, urging people to continue wearing their bracelets as a gesture in support of demands for a thorough tracing of the men still missing in Southeast Asia.

The advertisements also urge a mass outpouring of letters and telegrams to Congress demanding that "not one penny of your taxpayers' money be spent on rebuilding North Vietnam unless they return all our prisoners."

A meeting of the country's many organizations for the imprisoned and missing, including family groups, will be held in Los Angeles March 30 under VIVA sponsorship "to intensify our common efforts in alerting the American people to the fact that many men known to be prisoners have not been identified."

The meeting will discuss what should be done with the bracelets bearing the names of released prisoners and whether perhaps at some future time they should be melted down to build a national monument. Every returned man is being asked for suggestions.