

TOWN TURNS OUT TO GREET A P.O.W.

Sirens Wail in Uniondale for
L. I. Army Sergeant

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UNIONDALE, L.I., March 19 — Sgt. Richard Perricone's hometown gave him a rousing welcome today — something they had been waiting to do for more than six years.

Uniondale Avenue, the main thoroughfare was lined with American flags and banners were strung across the street proclaiming "Welcome Home, Richard." And as the fire chief's red car, trailed by a brown sedan carrying the returning prisoner of war, turned down Jerusalem Avenue, the firehouse and every engine in it let loose with sirens.

The Fire Department said that 8,000 to 10,000 people had lined the sidewalks. In a crush of affection, they pushed and shoved to touch the soldier who had been a prisoner of the Vietcong for nearly six years.

Uniondale is the heart of Nixon country on Long Island, the hometown of Joseph M. Margiotta, the Nassau Republican leader, and, as Charles Voorhes, post commander of the local American Legion, said, "There isn't a soul in town who didn't support those boys."

10 Died in War

More than 500 bracelets bearing the name of Richard Perricone had been sold here. In years past his father, Eugene, was a frequent visitor at high-school assemblies.

Ten of the 141 Uniondale sons who fought in the Vietnam war died there, and for a community of 22,387 "that is a record we are very very proud of," Mr. Voorhes observed, pointing to the sign in front of the American Legion post on Uniondale Avenue that lists each of the Vietnam veterans.

Inside, at the post's bar, several dozen men, many sporting their yellow-on-red nylon Legio jackets, toasted Sergeant Perricone and "all those other boys who went over there."

Thirty-five community organizations, virtually every one in Uniondale have banded together to organize a formal welcome home day at the end of April for Sergeant Perricone and all other Vietnam veterans from Long Island.

"There are no radical organizations here in Uniondale," one community organizer explained. "Uniondale was behind the war and behind the P.O.W.'s 100 per cent and we still are. When Nixon began the bombing again last December, everybody's heart was glad here. And, you see, why the P.O.W.'s themselves said that's what brought them some."

Others Return Quietly

The mass welcome for Sergeant Perricone was the first by any Long Island community. Other returning prisoners of war, such as Sgt. Arthur Cormier of Bay Shore, have slipped back to Long Island with scarcely a whisper, and most people, even in the home communities of the men, do not even realize they are home.

But in Uniondale, there were even baby carriages bedecked with tiny American flags in the crush of spectators in front of the high school.

"I'm trying to make him patriotic," Mrs. Joan Glibbery said as she wheeled her 18-month-old son, Christopher, who clutched one tiny flag among the ones fluttering from the edges of his pram.

Sirens Herald Arrival

Sirens heard blocks away heralded the arrival of the returning soldier. His progress was slow through the center of town.

When he reached the firehouse, which is at the community center of Uniondale, an unincorporated area in the Town of Hempstead, Sergeant Perricone was embraced by his grandmother, who rushed forward to his car. She had not seen him for seven years.

The streets off Uniondale Avenue were bedecked with flags on the small clapboard houses, hung from the doorways, on poles, draped across garage doors or sprouting on lawns.

"I love it," Sergeant Perricone kept repeating over and over again as the volunteer firemen formed a protective ring around him, guarding him from the thousands who pressed in to touch or see him. "I love everybody for what they're doing for me."