

He Got His Good Name Back



Mary McGrory

RESPECT FOR LIFE has hardly been the hallmark of the Nixon Administration, now less than ever. The Pentagon managed a little respect for death this week, however, in the case of Sergeant Abel Larry Kavanaugh, who precipitated a public relations crisis by being buried two days before the Fourth of July.

Kavanaugh, a 25-year-old Marine accused with seven other enlisted men of "collaborating" with the enemy, survived five years of imprisonment by the North Vietnamese, but less than five months of repatriation.

Fearful that the Marines would not let him go, he shot himself on June 27.

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HIS FUNERAL was a harrowing sight on television. His 22-year-old wife, Sandra, who is pregnant with her second child, looked on numbly as the flag-draped coffin was lowered into the ground. The Roman Catholic church, despite its rules about suicides, had given the sergeant the benefit of the doubt and granted him a Christian burial. The government had not. The only military representation was the guard of honor, comprised of six of the seven other men who had been accused with Kavanaugh.

Amnesty was posthumously granted. On July 3, the Army and Navy Secretary, belatedly remembering that there were "mitigating factors" gave Kavanaugh his good name back and dropped charges against the other seven.

Mrs. Kavanaugh said she was glad for the others and expressed the thought that

pierced a million other minds: "I'm only sorry it didn't happen before Larry died."

Was the Commander-In-Chief sorry? We are not told. He could have stopped the charges before they were made. The "mitigating factors" were present all along, and he has glorified the POWs as his own. But the impulse to sub-divide yet another group of Americans runs strong in this regime, and the trial of Kavanaugh and his friends may have offered yet another opportunity to prove the moral superiority of those who supported his policies.

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FROM San Clemente came word that the President was "anguished" over the weekend from the prospective cessation of all bombing over Cambodia. He had begged the Congress for just one more belt, and, knowing his addiction, they had humored him. Presumably, the threat of total abstention on August 15 was deeply troubling him.

Those doves who had gone along were outraged when they discovered that, in spite of his pledge of no escalation, he had doubled the daily dose of bombing.

Not to bomb, he had pleaded, would "cripple the chances for peace." But to bomb means that people will be crippled — not to say blinded, maimed and blown to bits. But one of the great achievements of this administration has been to transform concern for the victims into an affectation of the left, who would be better employed in rejoicing over the return of the POWs.

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