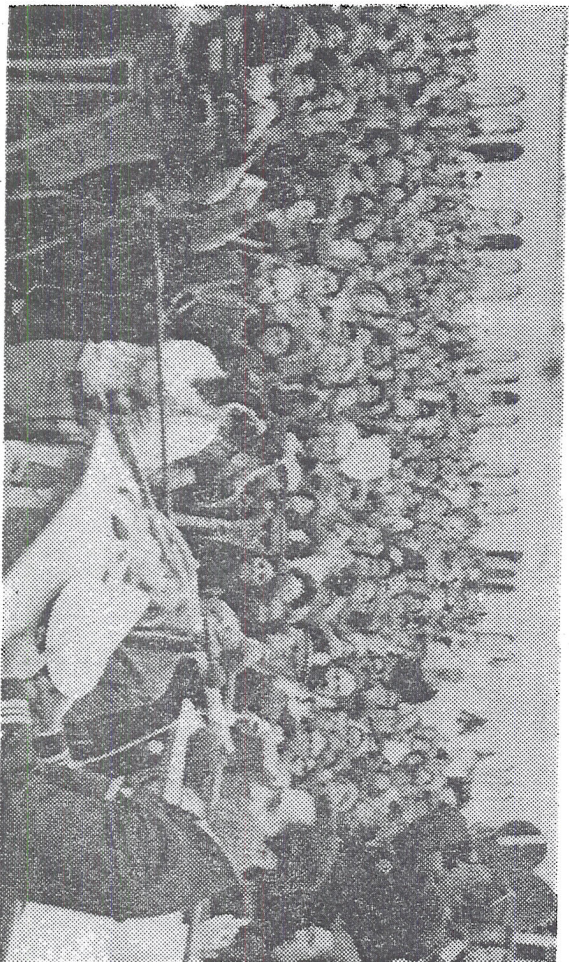


*'When they are without women and food,
food comes first in their dreams'*

The new world of ex-POW Alvarez



Welcome for Lt. Comm. Everett Alvarez Jr., longest held POW in North Vietnam, and right, Ev talks about his Scholarship Foundation.

—Examiner photo by Mark Southard

By Caroline Drewes

EVERETT ALVAREZ JR. went off to his appointment with destiny, a gung-ho young American.

Eight years, six months and six days later, Lt. Comm. Alvarez returned to find himself Chicano.

"I didn't realize I was a minority until people started telling me," he says.

It is one of the vast surging changes that Alvarez and his fellow POWs have confronted in the seven and a half months since they came home to a tumultuous heroes welcome.

Change is manifest in his own family. His mother, Soledad, who "dropped out" in the sixth grade to pick peas and eventually to become a conventional housewife in the Mexican tradition, has returned to the classroom to earn her high school diploma. His sister Delia, a shy college girl when he left, today is a militant vocal activist in Chicano and anti-war movements, a social worker, a leader.

And Everett today? The quiet loner who was born in Salinas, graduated an electrical engineer from Santa Clara University, first in his family with a higher education (his mother worked in packing sheds to help him through, he worked at a variety of part time jobs, and there was some scholarship assistance), a Mexican-American who made it, what of Ev today?

He was the first American aviator shot down,

captured and detained in North Vietnam. Considering his ordeal, his years in limbo, he looks remarkably the same, except for the sprinkling of silver in his hair. At 35, he seems still to be the same sort of man his old friends remember, an uncomplicated "straight" sort of man, a lover of athletics and of flying and the outdoors.

Now, sitting on the shore of a Sierra lake, fresh from camping in North Idaho, and a much-needed time to be alone again, he talks about the immediate past, the long-gone past, and the future.

He was alone the first 16 months as a captive. During the first year he was allowed 10 minutes out of his cell a day to wash. He was hungry until two years ago, when he says the North Vietnamese began to see the value of POWs as bargaining tools and "we began to be fed better than their own people."

What was the first thing he wanted after his release? Ev looks serious, then smiles, lights a cigarette. "I dreamed of a hot dog. When men are without women they dream of women," he says. "But when they are without women and food, food comes first in their dreams."

Two years ago, Tangee, the girl he had married two months before leaving for overseas, divorced Ev and married another man, and since has become a mother.

When Ev came home, the second man to step off the first plane of returning POWs, he fielded all

questions concerning Tangee. "No comment." It was nobody's business. Besides, "I'm me, not the guy whose wife divorced him."

Now, he says, "It was very, very hard. All those years, the dream, what you live for, this life is no longer there." While conceding, "It was probably harder for her, at least I could picture her at home, she had no idea what life was like for me. She was still living, she had to keep going. We were stagnant, put in a mason jar with the lid screwed on and put on a shelf."

"After awhile it was like a dream . . . The worst part is the most difficult to convey. The hours and days and weeks of dull boredom. The nothing was the worst part. I slept as much as I could, sleep is your best friend because you can escape, and then you revert to day-dreaming. I must have lived my whole life over three times."

Then Everett talks about Tammy Ilyas, the pretty Washington D.C. United Airlines passenger service representative whom he will marry later this month. Where did they meet? At the airport. When another traveler, local business bigwig Edmund Littlefield, passed through and mentioned the Bohemian Grove as his destination, Tammy sent Ev a message. For Ev was an enthusiastic guest at the encampment this summer.

So this is the immediate present for Lt. Commander Alvarez, who will spend the next few years at

Monterey Naval Post Graduate School working for his Master's in management and engineering.

But there is something else very important, and it involves his whole family: The Everett Alvarez Jr. Scholarship Foundation, headquartered at 2168 Bohannon Drive, Santa Clara — in legalese, a non-profit charitable educational corporation established this summer by the Alvarez family “to raise funds and set specific policies and rules for the granting of scholarships to worthy and needy high school seniors of Mexican American descent.”

He says, “Mexican-American.” He is cautious about the term Chicano. “In my family, with the older generation, it has been like the word ‘compadre’ or ‘paisano,’ there was no political connotation. But now it is not accepted by some people. To them it suggests a militant radical person. The word is disliked because of what the young people have done with it.”

Looking back, he says, of his own ordeal, “I came to know a lot about myself and about my fellow men. When you have to depend on someone else often in order to live, you find out what men can do, what they are . . . I have no bitterness about anything that happened, now.”
