

THE DEBRIEF

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JOINT PERSONNEL RECOVERY AGENCY

“That Others May Live...To Return With Honor.”

Provides operational planning, mission analysis, and staff assistance visits to DoD components and inter-agency partners, as appropriate, to satisfy PR acquirements.

Supports the reintegration process and manages the non-conventional assisted recovery program, coordinating requirements, funding and reporting procedures for the program.

Develops Joint PR technologies, experiments, and tactics, ensuring technology interoperability among all of the Services.



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Provides timely and focused assessments that identify current and future challenges to support the evaluation, development, and validation of PR capabilities and processes.

Develops doctrine, recommends policy, establishes PR security classification guidance and manages PR records and archives.





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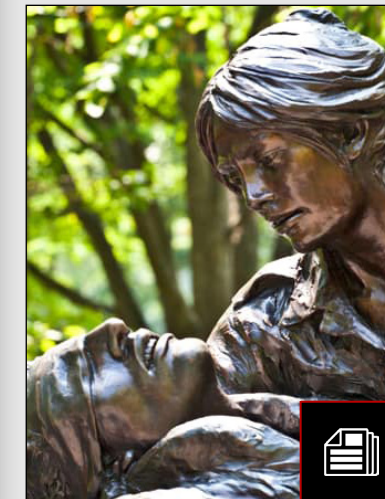
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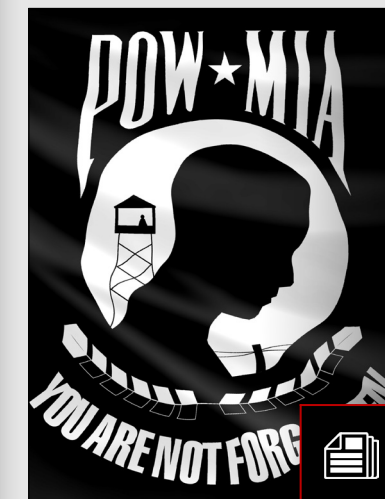
Left: "The Grip" by Charles Kuderna, 1968
Courtesy Department of Air Force Art Program

Spring 2023 Edition Articles:



The History of the National League of Families of Prisoner and Missing in Southeast Asia

Today, there are various resources and support groups for families to turn to for information and guidance. However, during the Vietnam War, minimal...



Archives Spotlight: The National League of Families' Committee on Repatriation, Rehabilitation, and Readjustment

In 1972, the National League established a Committee on repatriation, rehabilitation, and readjustment...



JPRA Featured Book of the Quarter

Unsure of whether they would be greeted as traitors or heroes, POWs returning from Vietnam responded by holding tight to their chosen motto, "Return with Honor."





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The History of the National League of Families of Prisoner and Missing in Southeast Asia

The History of the National League of Families of Prisoner and Missing in Southeast Asia
The stress and uncertainty associated with a loved one being isolated, missing, or captured can be overwhelming. Today, there are various resources and support groups for families to turn to for information and guidance. However, during the Vietnam War, minimal resources existed. After the World Wars, each military service developed an etiquette guide for military wives. The guides encouraged military wives to fill the role of a dutiful wife and strictly adhere to military policies and protocol without question. These guides instructed military wives to play a supportive role in their husband’s careers and center their lives on family, homemaking, and child-rearing. *Continued on next page ➡*

Left: A bronze statue depicting a female soldier caring for a wounded American POW. Part of The League of Wives (exhibit) at the *Virginia Museum of History and Culture* in Richmond, VA
(1 March 2019 - 3 September 2019)



...”*The History of the National League of Prisoner and Missing in Southeast Asia (continued)*

As the Vietnam War waged on, the number of missing and captured began to increase, and there was little to no information on the status of missing and captured. Military wives and families became increasingly frustrated with the lack of information on their loved ones and the military’s unofficial policy of “keep quiet/suffer in silence.” A group of military wives, under the leadership of Sybil Stockdale, would ultimately break the policy, capture national attention, and create the “National League of Families for Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia.” The League worked to raise awareness of the North Vietnamese treatment of American POWs, publicly

pressuring North Vietnam and privately pressuring the United States government (USG). The League’s efforts aimed to develop accountability for the missing and captured, improve the living conditions for POWs, increase government support for military families, and ultimately bring their loved ones home.

Suffer in Silence “Policy”

At the time of the Vietnam War, the USG’s policy was to keep information secret regarding service members missing in action. This policy extended unofficially to military families. The USG was concerned that going public would hinder negotiations with the North Vietnamese on returning POWs. The families of POW/MIA could not speak to anyone outside of their family about their husband’s personal or military

“At the time of the Vietnam War, the USG’s policy was to keep information secret regarding service members missing in action.”

service. They could not talk to the media and shine a light on their husband’s status or demand better conditions and treatment. They could not write to Communist leaders or heads of state to request their husband’s release. They were left to “suffer in silence.” “Don was part of the military intelligence organization. And we were told, or I was told, that I couldn’t say anything about him. Or if I had any calls from people that I did not recognize, um, the press or

anyone, that I was not allowed to open my mouth. The most I could say was name, rank, and serial number. Those were my instructions. So it was very difficult for me to relate to anyone about my situation.”¹ (Rander, 2019)- Andrea Rander, wife of Army Sgt Donald Rander, captured in February 1968. Sgt Rander was among the small percentage of POWs who were African American, Army and enlisted. In 1965, the POW/MIA wives

felt they were a low priority on President Johnson’s administration agenda. At the time, the military had assigned casualty assistance call officers (CACOs) to each POW and MIA family. However, the families had mixed feelings about the CACOs. Some families felt the CACO was helpful and dedicated, while others felt the CACOs were “too young and clueless to know how to deal with the POW and MIA families sensitively...and were indifferent towards the wives’

legal, financial and business problems” (Lee, 2019). In 1965, the wives and families of POW/MIAs feared that speaking to the press would put their husband’s safety in jeopardy. They believed the “keep quiet” policy had a purpose and ensured their husbands remained alive and well treated. However, the wives and families spoke out in the background, in private living rooms with each other and behind closed doors with military and government officials.

In 1966, two key events pushed the wives and families to place more pressure on the USG. The first was the televised “Hanoi Parade,” where the North Vietnamese Army marched POWs through the streets of Hanoi as North Vietnamese civilians brutally beat them.

Continued on next page ➡

¹ Rander, A. (2019, March 1). Breaking the Silence: League of Wives Panel Discussion. (A. Coleman, Interviewer) Retrieved from <https://virginiahistory.org/learn/historical-media/breaking-silence-league-wives-panel-discussion>



...”*The History of the National League of Prisoner and Missing in Southeast Asia* (continued)

The second was the televised interview of Jeremiah Denton, a Navy pilot shot down during a bombing mission from the aircraft carrier USS Independence in 1965 and held captive in Hanoi. During a North Vietnamese televised interview, Denton was questioned in the hope he would denounce the U.S. war policy. Instead, Denton expressed support for the USG and blinked in Morse Code “torture.” After these two events, it was clear the North Vietnamese were not treating their husbands well, and the “keep quiet” policy was not ensuring the safety of US POWs. From 1966-1968, the wives and families of POW/MIAs

continued to pressure the USG privately. They engaged in several letter-writing campaigns to raise awareness. The wives wrote to embassies, politicians, radios, and newspapers. They also started writing to each other. As the wives and families began to connect and share their stories and similar plights, a movement was born, led by Sybil Stockdale, wife of then Commander James Stockdale

presidential agenda. The Nixon administration received more than 2,000 telegrams, and Nixon and his staff responded personally to every telegram (Lee, 2019). Then in October 1968, Sybil went public in the San Diego Union Newspaper about her husband’s captivity. By January 1969, five other wives had spoken to the media and had their stories published in newspapers.

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The League of Wives

By the end of 1968, Sybil Stockdale and most POW/ MIA wives were dismissing the “keep quiet” policy. On the west coast, Sybil organized a telegram-in, urging POW/ MIA wives and families to send telegrams to the newly elected President Nixon to encourage him to put POW/ MIA issues at the top of his

Upper Left: December 1969. POW wives meet with President Nixon to discuss mistreatment of prisoners in Hanoi (Vietnam). From left to right are Carol Hansen, Louise Mulligan, Sybil Stockdale, Andrea Rander, and Pat Means. Source: Richard Nixon Presidential Library.

Upper Right: Washington DC, 1972. Evelyn Grubb presents the flag of the National League of Families in Southeast Asia to US SecDEF, Melvin R. Laird. Source: Associated Press

Lower Left & Right: Activist-led campaigns and mainstream media articles respectively informed the public of the plight of America’s POWs / MIAs. Focus by the collective population lead to the demand for policy changes by the US Government. Source: Unconfirmed





...”*The History of the National League of Prisoner and Missing in Southeast Asia (continued)*

After the influx of telegrams and news pieces on POWs, the Nixon administration decided to travel to San Diego, CA, to speak to local POW/MIA wives and families. In March, nearly 500 people attended the meeting with representation from the Navy, Air Force, and Marines. During the meeting, the POW/MIA wives and families vocalized their frustrations with the “keep quiet” policy, their concern for their husband’s safety and welfare, and the lack of action on the part of the USG to address the plight of the POW/MIAs. After the meeting, most wives felt their grievances would be ignored again. However, in May 1969, Sybil received a call that the Secretary of Defense

would publicly denounce the North Vietnamese and their treatment of the American POWs and violations of the Geneva Convention on national television.

The public USG acknowledgment of POWs’ inhumane treatment and living conditions empowered the wives to continue bringing international attention to their cause. In September 1969, six wives traveled to Paris to speak with Xuan Oanh, a member of the North Vietnamese government. The USG did not sponsor the trip, but the wives did alert the USG to their travel plans. During the meeting with Xuan Oanh, the wives delivered hundreds of letters of inquiry demanding information on American POW/MIAs. In return, the wives were questioned about their husbands, shown movies

“The public USG acknowledgment of POWs’ inhumane treatment and living conditions empowered the wives to continue bringing international attention to their cause.”

of napalm bombings, and urged to participate in peace movements (Lee, 2019). While the trip produced no real information from the Vietnamese, there was a drastic increase in the wives’ social profiles and attention to their cause. Following the Paris meeting in December 1969, Sybil Stockdale, Carole Hanson,

Louise Mulligan, Andrea Rander, and Pat Mearns attended a reception in Washington, DC. On December 12, 1969, the five women stood beside President Nixon as he shared the plight of the POW/MIA and their wives with the American people. The USPOW’s wives and families finally felt their voices and concerns were being heard.

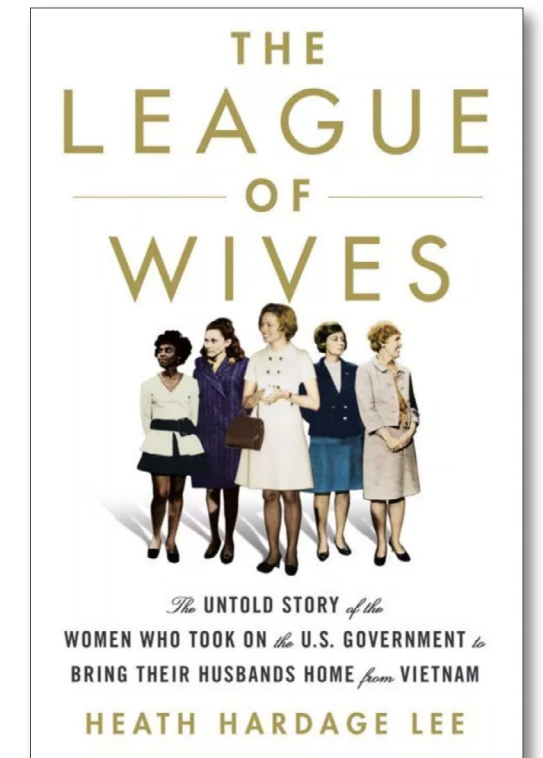
By the end of 1969, the POW/MIA wives’ activities were gaining momentum in some areas, but still stalling in others, especially regarding the media. To obtain national publicity, the wives realized they needed a national organization. The wives had already coordinated across the country to organize various efforts, but an official name

was still required. Born from this insight was the title “The National League of Families of American Prisoners of War and Missing in Southeast Asia.”

International Attention

Under President Nixon, the POW/MIA wives were given the freedom to go public about their husbands’ capture and

Continued on next page ➡





...”*The History of the National League of Prisoner and Missing in Southeast Asia* (continued)

treatment, and the “keep quiet/suffer in silence” policy was repealed. In January 1970, Carole Hanson and three other wives embarked on an international tour to put pressure on North Vietnam.

In a JPRA Oral History interview with Carole [Hansen] Hickerson, she shared the story of her trip: [See figure 1] The League’s efforts reached an apex in May 1970 when Senator Bob Dole opened the May 1 Appeal for International Justice/ National League rally at Constitution Hall. The rally of military wives and families, supported by high-level politicization, entertainers, and public figures, aimed to inform the world about POWs’ human rights violations in North Vietnam. During the rally, Sybil addressed the “keep quiet policy” and the challenges of POW/MIA wives and families. But the rally became electrified when POW wife Louise Mulligan gave her famous “May Day!” speech.

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Above: Carole [Hansen] Hickerson and her husband Marine Corps Officer Stephen Hansen.
Source: Carole Hickerson. Private Photo.

[FIGURE 1: JPRA ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW:
CAROLE [HANSEN] HICKERSON]

“We got a lot of publicity on the trip and international publicity because the different countries we were in gave us publicity also. Just a few, we all met with Indira Gandhi in India, we met with the Pope in Rome, we met with various International Red Cross representatives; we were in Great Britain and Italy, of course, and Romania, which was interesting because at the time Romania was still behind the Iron Curtain... And our last stop was to try and go to North Vietnam to at least see the North Vietnamese in Vientiane, Laos. The trip took a whole month, and by this time, we were getting a lot of publicity from the Associated Press and UPI and international press outlets that distributed their stories through the world... We tried to get into, well to, North Vietnam, and we couldn’t get the authorization to go, and we were put in a hotel. We were under arrest, I guess you could call it; we couldn’t leave, only to get our meals, and we had to walk across a big open field to go to the terminal...we didn’t get in to see the North Vietnamese, but we did get a lot of publicity. When we came back, the four of us testified before the House Armed Services Committee.”

Carole Hansen Hickerson Oral History Interview. Carole was married to Stephen Hansen, a Marine officer shot down in June 1967, and initially declared MIA. His remains were recovered in 1999).



...*"The History of the National League of Prisoner and Missing in Southeast Asia (continued)*

"We beg of you to hear our call- May Day! May Day! Do not turn your back on the hundreds of mothers who want their sons returned, do not ignore the children who cry out for the love and guidance of their fathers and the hundreds of wives who have grieved for years, some for husbands who will never return! Hear our call of distress and the cry from within the walls of the prison caps- May Day! May Day! Help! Please help!" (Lee, 2019).²

After a successful rally, The National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing Southeast Asia was officially incorporated on May 28, 1970. The League's organization comprised of five regions, each with a regional coordinator. Each state also had its own League coordinator. They were tasked with providing updates on their region or State's respective activities, fundraising, and publicity efforts to League headquarters. In June 1970, the wives opened an official office at 1 Constitution Ave. The League was adamant about being nonpolitical and nonpartisan. Still, as the war continued and their husbands remained in captivity, some wives and families departed the League to pursue a more public political and partisan stance with related organizations. The wives' concerns were being heard, and things were changing with the USG and North Vietnam, but there was still a lot of work to be done. ■



Above: Louise Mulligan was a key fixture in the League of Wives movement. Her husband Naval Captain James A. Mulligan was shot down over Vietnam in March 1966. Mulligan was held captive until February 1973. Source: Unconfirmed

Left: Louise delivered a memorable speech entitled "May Day" in 1970 at a rally in Washington, DC.

Right: Newspaper article from 1970 highlighting Mulligan's tireless efforts on behalf of American POWs in Vietnam and other wives of American POWs and MIAs.

Source: Unconfirmed

POW wife couldn't remain silent

By ANNIE McWILLIAMS

VIRGINIA BEACH—Up until May of last year Mrs. Louise Mulligan remained quiet.

Like other women married to American servicemen missing in action or held prisoner in Southeast Asia, she had followed the advice of the U.S. government. It was thought by speaking out they might endanger the lives or well-being of their husbands.

Mrs. Mulligan's husband, Cmdr. James Alfred Mulligan Jr., was executive officer of VA 36 flying over North Vietnam when his plane was shot down four years ago in March.

Since that time she has received 15 letters from him.

Last May the frustration of not knowing became too much.

The POW wives, says Mrs. Mulligan "were getting to the point where we felt, what good does it do to keep quiet?"

The first efforts of the POW wives were directed toward the government of North Vietnam. Now, says Mrs. Mulligan, the appeals will be directed toward the U.S.—its citizens and its elected officials.

Until now the POW wives, though a tightly knit group, were informally organized. Today they are a chartered non-profit organization: The National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia. They have a national office in Washington, D.C. Mrs. Mulligan is coordinator for the State of Virginia. Her former jurisdiction was over four states—Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and

Delaware—and the District of Columbia.

"We have found that the North Vietnamese do react. They do not like criticism," she said during an interview Thursday in her home.

"Results to date of the wives' appeals have been: Release of a partial list of names of men held prisoner in North Vietnam, a promise (as yet unfulfilled) that the wives would receive a letter a month from their husbands, and permission to send a 6½-lb. relief package to prisoners every two months.

"We know they're getting the packages," says Mrs. Mulligan. "My husband has specifically mentioned the vitamins."

In the past the wives had mailed one package a year, usually at Christmastime, to their husbands. Without fail they were returned to them.

Medical supplies and vitamin supplements are most often packed, says Mrs. Mulligan. "You can't get very much in 6½ pounds."

Mrs. Mulligan says emphasis in the future will be on those men who are listed as missing in action (nearly 800 in South Vietnam). Families of these men, she said, have gone up to three years without a word. The organization will be meeting in Washington, D.C. Oct 3-7, and is presently lobbying for a joint session of Congress during that week.

The group has established a national speaker's bureau and will continue to press its bill-



Mrs. Louise Mulligan

POW wife displays her husband's photograph and sign which expresses the opposite of her and other wives feelings concerning the POW-MIA issue. She is state coordinator of the National League of Families of Prisoners Missing in Southeast Asia

board campaign. They will also appeal to candidates for office to make the prisoner of war issue a part of their campaign for election.

All of this, said Mrs. Mulligan, will be "with the prime target of getting our men home at the earliest possible date."

The Mulligans have six boys between the ages of 19 and 8.

Mrs. Mulligan says she has tried to devote the summer to them and her work for the POW wives has lapsed a little.

"You feel torn in many directions," she said. "You're trying to be a mother and a father to your children and you feel you have to do everything you possibly can for your husband."

"I used to be very organized,"

she said. "Now, I tell them when they get word Jim Mulligan is coming home, I'll have to have six weeks to clean up that bedroom."

Mrs. Mulligan's bedroom has become the office for her activities in behalf of the prisoners of war. She has two typewriters there, a file and "a lot of things that should have been filed," she said.



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Archives Spotlight: The National League of Families’ Committee on Repatriation, Rehabilitation, and Readjustment

The JPRA Archives has several documents from various agencies that describes the interactions of the National League of POW/MIA Families with various military officers and federal government officials regarding the status of their loved ones. Official communications show that some of the relatives of POWs had very strong responses to what they perceived the Department of Defense was doing or not doing to locate their missing relatives. Some spouses and relatives were extremely reluctant to accept the possibility that their prisoner of war (POW) or missing in action (MIA) loved ones might have perished in captivity. Wives of some MIA personnel visited other nations and spoke with their governments in efforts to locate their missing husbands, and even appeared before the House Armed Services Committee in 1970.¹

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Left: “The National League of Families of American Prisoners, Missing, and Unaccounted-For From the Vietnam War” based in Falls Church, Virginia.

¹ AFXPPCS, Item of Interest, c. 1970, (MFCH 5023), p. 1.



...”*National League of Families (continued)*

The National League also made several suggestions to the Department of Defense and the U.S. Congress, namely concerning the methods utilized by the Air Force in relation to family support and the repatriation of POWs.

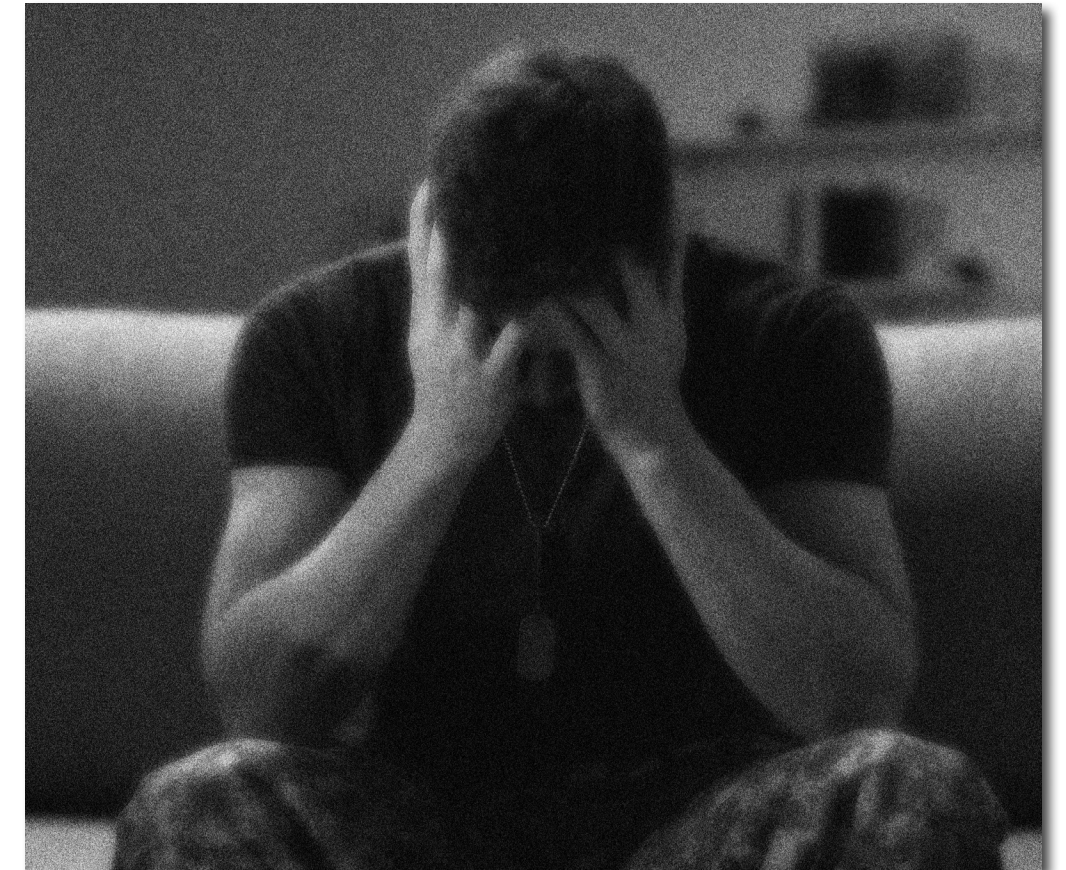
In 1972, the National League established a Committee on repatriation, rehabilitation, and readjustment, chaired by Mrs. Iris R. Powers. The Committee first met March 24-26, 1972 to discuss the current repatriation procedures, and made several recommendations by May 1972. In a memo dated May 20, 1972, the Committee recommended first that “it is imperative that the Air Force adopt a program of assigning Assistance Officers on the basis of one family per Assistance Officer as is

“returning POWs were not “just another patient” or “just another disease”, and must be treated by physicians with particular regard for the trauma they suffered during captivity.”

now the practice of the other Services.” The Committee believed that the Air Force Assistance Program, as it then stood in 1972, was woefully inadequate in assisting families. Committee members polled POW/MIA family members and found they believed that the Assistance Officers currently assigned were often unqualified, and

displayed little regard to the gravity of locating POW/MIAs and providing relief to their families.² The Committee met again in June 22-25, 1972 with 21 members in attendance. At the meeting, they were briefed by a psychologist from the Center for POW Studies. More recommendations came after that meeting, perhaps

the most important one being “All physicians and other medical and paramedical personnel should be given careful advance instruction in the psychological aspects (and possible pitfalls) of their relationship with returning prisoners.”³ This recommendation recognized that returning POWs were not “just another patient” or



“just another disease”, and must be treated by physicians with particular regard for the trauma they suffered during captivity. The Committee noted that returning POWs could be in a fragile mental state with emotional bewilderment upon being repatriated. Normal military discipline or

procedures should be relaxed as far as possible so that the returnee could be free to heal and recover physically and psychologically.⁴

The Committee understood that healing was a process, and recommended, “For those

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² Recommendations and Comments from the Repatriation, Rehabilitation, and Readjustment Committee, National League of Families, May 20, 1972, (MFCH 5028), p. 1.

³ Recommendations and Comments from the Repatriation, Rehabilitation, and Readjustment Committee, National League of Families, July 24, 1972, (MFCH 5028), p. 11.

⁴ Ibid.



...”*National League of Families*
(continued)

returnees who do not elect to remain in the Service, a health-care program that meets their psychological and physical needs must be established to provide care on a long-range continuing basis, preferably through the monitoring and referral services of the recommended Armed Forces Center for POW Studies.”⁵

The Navy had recently established a Center for POW Studies, and the Committee hoped it would be re-designated as the “Armed Forces Center for POW Studies,” with all-service participation, and the Navy designated as Executive Agency.⁶ The newly established center eventually became known as the Robert E. Mitchell Center for POW Studies. In December of 1972, the

“These changes aid prisoners of war to adjust both psychologically and physically upon their return from captivity and support reconnecting with their relatives.”

Committee recommended other changes to the Department of Defense, which included: “We strongly urge, again, that families receive copies of all available information in the man’s official file (“sanitized” of any secret information) upon the request of the primary next-of-kin, and PNOK’s who have not seen the complete file be especially reminded of its

accessibility upon any status change.”⁷ It was hoped that by acting on this recommendation that the relatives of missing service members would be better prepared to accept any official changes in status, by being fully informed about the circumstances of their loved one’s capture or disappearance.⁸ Multiple recommendations were created

curing that month, some more far-reaching than others. For instance, recommendation #5 stated that the Defense Department should exempt the sons of returning prisoners of war from the draft for at least a year after return.⁹ The Committee believed POWs returning from captivity should not be unduly separated from their sons after the massive

trauma endured by both the POW and his relatives. Overall, the work of the Committee on repatriation, rehabilitation, and readjustment was well received by the Department of Defense. The recommendations were forwarded to a special POW/MIA Task Force established by the DoD at the Pentagon for review and approval. These changes aid prisoners of war to adjust both psychologically and physically upon their return from captivity and support reconnecting with their relatives. More specific details about how the DoD, and in particular, the Air Force, responded to the Committee’s recommendations will be discussed in future articles.

The work of the National League together with the Air Force Task Force’s and

the Department of Defense to update the status of their lost relatives and bring them home may have been an uphill battle at first, with the DoD and the National League being at odds with how to handle the search and rescue efforts and with how to keep the family members informed. Nevertheless, by the time of Operation Homecoming in 1973, the joint efforts between the Department of Defense and the National League paid off tremendously, as 591 POWs returned home. ■

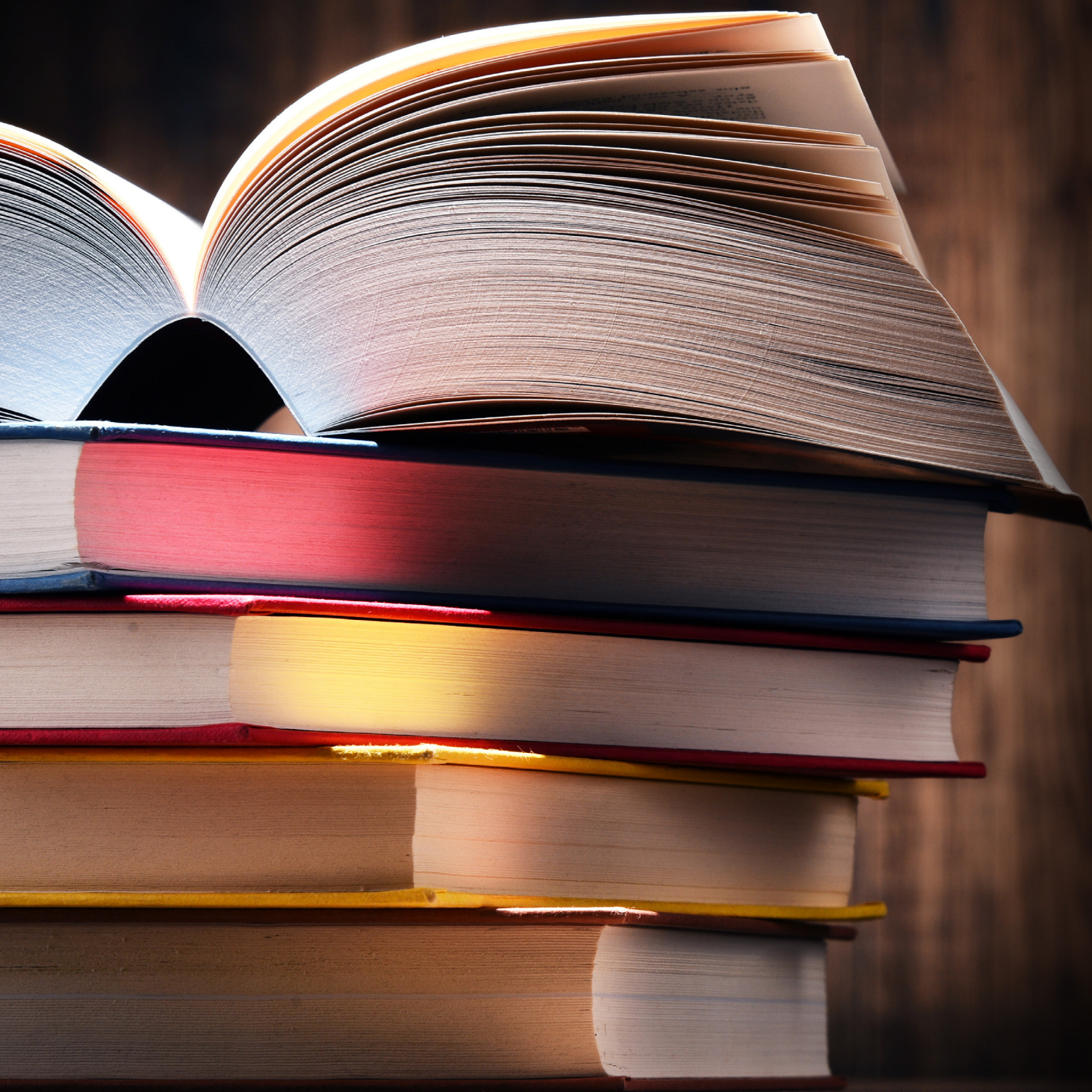
⁵ Ibid.

⁷ Recommendations and Comments from the Repatriation, Rehabilitation, and Readjustment Committee League of Families, (December 20, 1972), MFCH 5029, p. 7

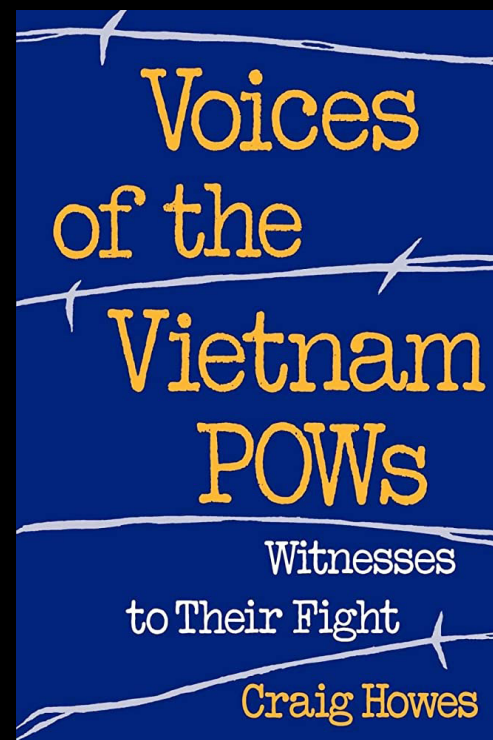
⁹ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.



JPRA Featured Book of the Quarter



“Voices of the Vietnam POWs: Witnesses to their Fight”

by Craig Howes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). 304 pages. ISBN: 978-0195086805
Call Number: DS559.4 .H68 1993

Summary from the Publisher:

Unsure whether they would be greeted as traitors or heroes, POWs returning from Vietnam responded by holding tight to their chosen motto, “Return with Honor.” “We’re giving the American people what they want and badly need--heroes,” said a Vietnam jungle POW. “I feel it’s our responsibility, our duty to help them where possible shed the idea this war was a waste, useless, as unpopular as it may have been.”

In the first book to explore the entire range of memoirs, biographies, and group histories published since America’s Vietnam POWs returned home, Craig Howes explores the development of a collective history. He describes how these captives drew upon their national heritage to compose a unified, common story while still in prison, and how individual POWs have responded to this Official Story. Examining what racial, cultural, and political assumptions support this shared Official Story, Howes places the POWs’ experiences squarely in the center of American history, and within those larger clashes of opinion and belief which characterized the nation’s response to the Vietnam War. The result is an engrossing study of what these captivity narratives can tell us about the POWs, their captors, and America’s Vietnam legacy. ■