

The League of Wives



Vietnam's POW/MIA Allies & Advocates

- Based on the book by Heath Hardage Lee *The League of Wives: The Untold Story of the Women Who Took on the U.S. Government to Bring Their Husbands Home from Vietnam* (St. Martin's Press).

Photo credits (top to bottom): Associated Press, The Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Dole Archives



A Reluctant Sorority

"The bravest most magnificent women I have ever met . . .

The First Ladies of America!" —President Nixon's toast to POW wives and mothers, May 24, 1973

As early as March 1964, even before active combat units were deployed to Vietnam, American servicemen were taken prisoner by the North Vietnamese.

For years, with little or no information about their husband's status, wives waited at home in silence, following the US government's orders to "Keep Quiet".

They decided to take matters into their own hands, organizing privately, until challenging the Johnson administration's stance — and finding allies in President Nixon, his administration, Congress, and others.

On May 28, 1970, under the leadership of Sybil Stockdale, the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia was incorporated in Washington, DC.

Sybil, along with Jane Denton, Phyllis Galanti, Louise Mulligan, Helene Knapp, and hundreds of other wives, were already the POW and MIAs most fervent advocates.

They would go to extraordinary lengths to facilitate their husbands' freedom.



'They also serve . . .'

WIVES AND RELATIVES of American prisoners of war and men reported missing in action listen intently as the welfare of their men is discussed during a recent report to a joint session of Congress. Also in the audience are Gen. William C. Westmore-

land (lower row, center), Army chief of staff, and other military and Government officials. As Milton said in his sonnet, *On His Blindness*, "They also serve who only stand and wait." (Department of Defense Photo)

Clipping from The Fuji Flyer, November 6, 1970. Dole Archives



President Nixon meets with POW wives Carole Hansen, Louise Mulligan, Sybil Stockdale, Andrea Rander, and Mary Mearns, December 12, 1969. Courtesy Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum

Leading Ladies



Portrait of Jane Denton. Karen Fortier, artist. Courtesy Jerry Denton

● Jane Denton

(March 22, 1926 - November 22, 2007)

Jane was an elegant, Southern belle with a strong Catholic faith. This intensely patriotic woman with deep conservative roots became a well-known East Coast organizer for the League, serving on the organization's board. Many East Coast League wives viewed Jane as the "glue" that held the women together when the going got tough.



Portrait of Phyllis Galanti. Courtesy Jeff Galanti

● Phyllis Galanti

(January 14, 1941 - April 23, 2014)

As a young military wife, Phyllis was so terrified of public speaking that she was unable to use her French college degree to teach in a classroom. Ironically, her fluency in French helped her save her husband's life when she lobbied Vietnamese diplomats for American POWs' release. She became known throughout her home state of Virginia as "Fearless Phyllis." She was elected Chairwoman of the National League in 1972.



Portrait of Louise Mulligan, 1948. Jim Mulligan commissioned this portrait of Louise in Italy while on a cruise, just after their marriage. Courtesy Louise Mulligan

● Louise Mulligan

(July 1, 1929 -)

Louise inspired Jane Denton, Phyllis Galanti and countless other POW/MIA wives on the East Coast to speak out about their husband's captured or missing status. The Joan of Arc figure of the POW/MIA wife movement, Louise's stirring "May Day" speech at the International Appeal for Justice on May 1, 1970, provoked a visceral reaction among the POW/MIA families in the Washington, DC audience. She was the Virginia State Coordinator for the League in 1970.



Portrait of Sybil Stockdale, 1980. Margaret Holland Sargent, artist. Coronado Historical Society, Coronado, CA. Gift of the Stockdale Family

● Sybil Stockdale

(November 25, 1924 - October 10, 2015)

As the highest-ranking Navy POW wife, Sybil was automatically in charge of the West Coast Navy POW/MIA wives according to military protocol. She founded the League of Wives of American Vietnam Prisoners of War (later known as the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia). Her tireless, fearless spirit inspired POW/MIA wives nationwide and set the tone for the National League. She was the first of the wives to speak publicly with the media about her POW husband's plight.



Portrait of Helene Knapp. Courtesy Helene Knapp

● Helene Knapp

(December 9, 1928 -)

Helene's husband, Air Force Colonel Herman Knapp, was shot down just after he taped and mailed a loving message to his family at home saying how much he missed them all. Helene relocated to Washington DC from Colorado, bringing her two young children with her, to work for the National League. Her razor sharp memory for details and her fundraising ability made her instrumental in the organization's success. Helene was elected Coordinator of the League in 1972.

An Undeclared War has

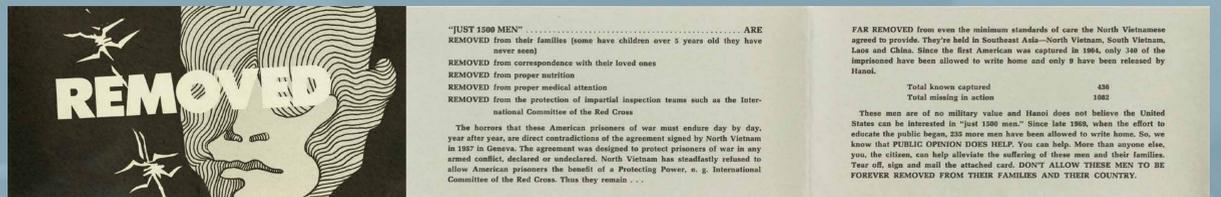
“Many in Congress did not know the difference between an MIA and a POW.”

- Bob Dole, on Congress's awareness of POW/MIA issues in 1969

US combat operations begin in 1965, after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution authorized President Johnson to “take all necessary measures” to prevent attacks on US forces. Troop levels escalated exponentially. However, Americans were largely unaware of the scale of the conflict until the late 1960s.

They were also unaware of the POW problem, and, due primarily to President Johnson’s “Keep Quiet” policy, Congress was also.

The POW/MIA wives were told that speaking in public about their husbands could further endanger them and derail peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese. However, this silence also meant that Congress was uninformed about their situation.



Letter plea leaflet, ca. 1970. Courtesy Galanti family

What is a POW?

Prisoner of War. A detained person as defined in Articles 4 and 5 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of August 12, 1949. In particular, one who, while engaged in combat under orders of his or her government, is captured by the armed forces of the enemy.

What is an MIA?

Missing In Action. The casualty is a hostile casualty, other than the victim of a terrorist activity, who is not present at his or her duty location due to apparent involuntary reasons and whose location is unknown.

In violation of the 1949 Geneva Convention, POWs were being tortured, starved, beaten, interrogated and forced to repeat Communist propaganda statements in written confessions and sometimes in televised interviews. The wives and families of these men were told by President Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration to “Keep Quiet” for fear of derailing peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese. This proved to be a dangerous policy. The wives realized long before their government did that the only way to free the men was to speak out publicly, to tell the world the truth.

ARTICLE	REQUIREMENT	DRV PERFORMANCE
13	PWs must be humanely treated, protected; reprisals against PWs prohibited.	Paraded in streets, forced to make statements; some torture.
21	PWs not to be held in “close confinement.”	Many PWs held in solitary confinement for years.
23	Mark PW camps so as visible from air, give information on camp locations.	No markings on camps; locations concealed.
26	Provide sufficient food, prevent loss of weight, take account of normal diet.	Released PWs state that standard fare consists of pumpkin soup, rice, bread, pig fat. All PWs underweight and suffering from malnutrition.
30	Adequate medical care.	Much evidence of inadequate medical care (photos, released PWs); prisoners dying in camps.
34	Regular religious services.	Only evidence in films of some Christmas services.
70	Write to family within one week of capture.	Some have not written for five years.
71	Minimum of 2 letters and 4 cards a month.	Average of 2-3 letters per year (none at all for some).
72	Free receipt of parcels.	DRV states that PWs can receive a package every other month. Evidence indicates delivery is irregular; parcels sent to “dead” not returned.
109	Immediate repatriation of seriously sick and wounded. Release of PWs long held in captivity.	No regular release of sick and wounded or long held PWs; state of health or duration of imprisonment has not appeared to be a determining factor in those releases which have taken place.
120	Advise of deaths in captivity, full official information on circumstances, cause, burial, grave identification.	Rare assertion of death through unofficial and irregular channels, no details.
122	Advise promptly names of all PWs held.	Never released official or complete list.
126	Neutral inspection of all camps, interview of PWs without witnesses.	No inspection; propaganda interviews only.

* Released by U. S. Ambassador Bruce at December 1, 1970, press conference in Paris.

Reproduced from the Department of Defense, Commanders Digest, 16 Jan 71

The Geneva Conventions are international treaties that seek to limit barbarous acts in war. The third Convention applies to prisoners of war. The terms of the 1949 Geneva Conventions were accepted by the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam in 1957. Dole Archives

Consequences for POWs



CODE OF CONDUCT

I

I am an American, fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.

II

I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command I will never surrender the members of my command while they still have the means to resist.

III

If I am captured I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.

IV

If I become a prisoner of war, I will keep faith with my fellow prisoners. I will give no information or take part in any action which might be harmful to my comrades. If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the lawful orders of those appointed over me and will back them up in every way.

V

When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am required to give name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause.

VI

I will never forget that I am an American, fighting for freedom, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America.

POWs were being tortured, starved, beaten, interrogated and forced to repeat Communist propaganda statements in written confessions and filmed interviews - conditions that would violate the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

For their part, the North Vietnamese claimed that because war in Vietnam had never been officially declared, the Geneva Conventions did not apply.

The wives and their families suffered too. In addition to years of emotional distress and social isolation, they received little or no official information about their husbands; their military benefits were reduced or they were denied access to them; and their ability to manage their own affairs were impeded by expired power-of-attorneys and other legal impediments common to women at the time.

President Dwight Eisenhower introduced the Code of Conduct in 1955, partially in response to the experiences of Korean War POWs. The code was based on traditions dating back to the American Revolution, and it gave prisoners a command structure to follow, even when they were trapped within prison walls. Courtesy Heath Hardage Lee

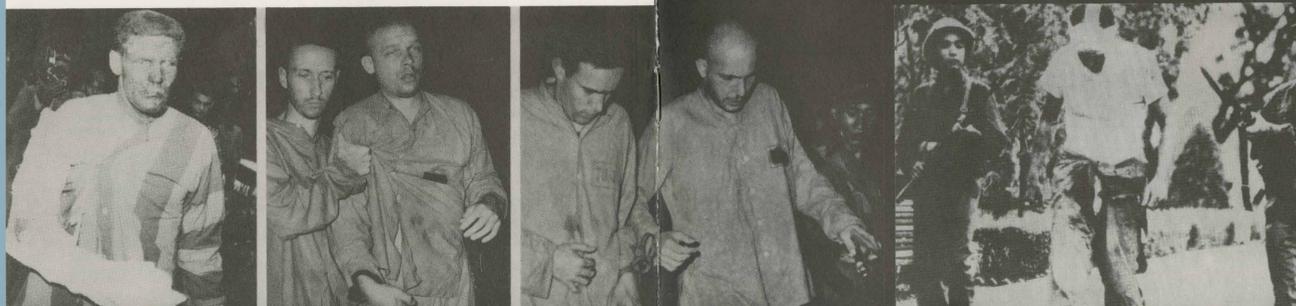
Prisoners were held in the North, such as the Hoa Lo or "Hanoi Hilton", as well as in South Vietnam.

Images like these were not widely seen until after the wives went public, beginning in 1968, and were mostly broadly disseminated during and after 1970.

National League of Families of American Prisoners in Southeast Asia
P. O. Box 4116
Virginia Beach, Virginia 23454

Have you forgotten ...

...them?



Informational pamphlet published by the National League. Dole Archives

1965

July 18 Navy Commander Jeremiah Denton shot down

Sept 9 Navy Commander James Stockdale shot down

1966

March 20 Navy Captain James Mulligan shot down

June 17 Navy Lt. Commander Paul Galanti shot down

October 7 The first San Diego Area POW/MIA Wives meeting at 547 A Avenue in Coronado, California, around Sybil Stockdale's massive dining room table.



Stockdale home, 547 A Avenue, Coronado, California. Courtesy Kristine Bartley

1967

At the urging of Naval Intelligence Officer Bob Borroughs, Sybil and her Navy POW/MIA wife colleagues create a formal POW/MIA awareness group called the League of Wives of American Vietnam Prisoners of War.

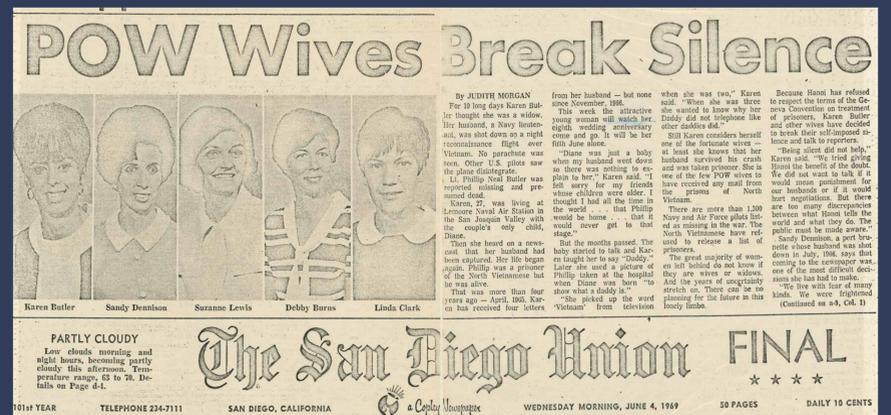
October East Coast POW/MIA wives, including early leaders Louise Mulligan, Jane Denton and Phyllis Galanti begin to organize out of the Virginia Beach area, joining the efforts of the West Coast League wives. POW/MIA wives on both coasts join forces under Sybil Stockdale's leadership.

April 24 Air Force Colonel Herman Knapp shot down

Air Force wives from the Interior West (led by MIA wife Helene Knapp) and elsewhere in the Midwest begin joining the POW/MIA cause.

1968

October 27 Sybil's interview in the San Diego Union Tribune is the first published article about the POW/MIA situation in Vietnam.



San Diego wives went public with their stories in The San Diego Union June 4, 1969. Courtesy Debby Burns Henry



(L-R.) Secy. Dean Rusk, President Lyndon B. Johnson, Secy. Robert McNamara meet in the Cabinet Room at the White House, February 1968. Courtesy Lyndon B. Johnson Library



Sybil Stockdale, President Nixon, Phyllis Galanti, and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, May 15, 1971. Washington, D.C. Courtesy Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum

1969

January President Nixon is inaugurated.

The League of Wives of American POWs in North Vietnam is launched by West Coast POW wives under Sybil Stockdale's leadership.

The East Coast POW/MIA Wives also begin to "Go Public" about their husbands' plight with President Nixon's encouragement.

May 19 Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird hosts a live, televised "Go Public" press conference to expose the North Vietnamese violations of the Geneva Conventions regarding American POWs and MIAs.

June 8 Nixon announces the withdrawal of 25,000 American troops from Vietnam, beginning his process of "Vietnamization."

This strategy allowed for gradual withdrawal of American troops and the simultaneous training of South Vietnamese soldiers to take over the war.

December Ross Perot and his POW/MIA awareness group "United We Stand" begins flying POW and MIA wives and families to France to confront the North Vietnamese at their embassy in Paris. He also attempts to fly gifts and medical supplies to the POWs.

1970

February After a disappointing showing of POW/MIA support at Constitution Hall in DC, Senator Robert J. Dole is appalled by the lack of support for American prisoners in Vietnam. He calls Sybil Stockdale for help. Together, they vow to "Fill the Hall" with at least 1,000 supporters by May.

May 1 International Appeal for Justice event, hosted by Senator Dole, opens the National League Conference. Louise Mulligan gives her famous "May Day" speech. Sybil Stockdale and Bob Dole do fill the hall with 3,800 POW/MIA supporters.

May 2 First National League Conference held in DC following the International Appeal for Justice event. Sybil Stockdale, founder of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia becomes the organization's first National Coordinator.

May 28 The National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia is incorporated in Washington, DC.

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 Christmas, 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. Dec. 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.

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.

Louise Mulligan took her story to the Ledger-Star in Norfolk, VA on August 4, 1970. Courtesy Louise Mulligan

Six Stages of Being a POW Wife

— by Sybil Stockdale

SHOCK

CONFUSION

ASSESSMENT

LEARNING

PLANNING

ACTION

S U M M A R Y

Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws

National League of Families of
American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia

The Corporation shall exist for so long as its purposes remain unfulfilled--as long as men are missing or captured in Southeast Asia.

The Purposes of the League are to assist all Americans who are captured or believed to be captured in Southeast Asia and their families by:

1. Securing humane treatment in accordance with the requirements of the 1949 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War and as recognized by general humanitarian standards for those Americans captured in Southeast Asia,
2. By obtaining identification of all those who are being held captive by the North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong, the Pathet Lao and other hostile forces,
3. By obtaining proper medical care for all,
4. By making the American people and the people of the world aware of the unconscionable plight of those Americans who are missing or captured in Southeast Asia and their families,
5. By facilitating and promoting communication of information of mutual interest among all families of missing and captured Americans,
6. By facilitating and developing activities with other private or public groups or organizations and governmental agencies which are working to achieve the same humanitarian objectives,
7. By maintaining and supporting the morale of all captured and missing Americans and their families; and above all,
8. By obtaining at the earliest possible time the release of and a complete accounting for all captured or missing Americans in Southeast Asia.

The League shall not engage in any activities that are inconsistent with the qualification of the League as a charitable, humanitarian, non-profit, non-partisan corporation exempt from federal income taxation in accordance with the provisions of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 or any successor thereto, and no part of the net earnings of the League shall inure to the benefit of any private person.

The affairs of the League shall be managed by a Board of Directors, who shall hold office until their successors are duly elected and qualified in accordance with the By-Laws--and listed as follows:

Mrs. Donald C. Rander	Mrs. Kenneth North
Mrs. Iris R. Powers	Mrs. Arthur S. Mearns
Mrs. Stephen Hanson	Mrs. Jeremiah Denton
Mrs. James B. Stockdale	Mrs. Arthur Cormier
Mrs. Bobby Vinson	Col. Edwin L. Brinckmann
Mrs. Gordon M. Perisho	Mrs. Samuel Johnson
Mrs. Robert C. Davis	Mrs. James F. Egan
	Mrs. Bruce Johnson

The League shall be composed solely of family members of missing or captured Americans in Southeast Asia. "Family member" shall be given

"We never presented ourselves as hawks or doves. We were very mindful of our husband's positions and our husband's dignity."

- Kathleen Johnson Frisbie in a 2017 interview, on the National League's nonpartisan stance

Excerpts from official National League documents, 1970. Dole Archives

Newsletter

**National League of Families of
American Prisoners and
Missing in Southeast Asia**
one constitution Avenue N.E.
Washington, D. C. 20002



*POW wife Marlene McGrath at a meeting lead by Sybil Stockdale.
Courtesy Debby Burns Henry*

Military wives become humanitarian activists

The League of Wives of American Vietnam Prisoners of War, known among the members as "The San Diego League", was conceived at Sybil Stockdale's dining room table at 547 A Avenue in Coronado, CA., in October of 1966.

Thirteen area POW and MIA wives came together to meet about their missing spouses. By the fall of 1967, the organization was established and quickly gained membership.

By May of 1970, this regional organization had evolved into the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia and was incorporated in Washington, DC, as a nonpartisan nonprofit.

Under President Nixon, this humanitarian group became a powerful lobby to bring the American POWs in Vietnam home and to account for all MIAs.



West Coast POW wives meet Bob Hope. (right-left) Debby Burns, Jenny Connell, and Sharon Abbott. Courtesy Debby Burns Henry

The Choice to Challenge Conventions

The expectations for military wives were like those for women in broader society in the post-war period. They were expected to be excellent wives, mothers, cooks, and hostesses, and most women still followed a domestic model where home and family were paramount.

However, the role of a military wife was steeped in a formal tradition that punished breaks in protocol. Outspoken or opinionated wives were often viewed as a liability. Wives and husbands often saw each other as an inseparable unit when it came to their “joint” military career. “Bad” behavior from a wife reflected upon her husband and could kill his chances for advancement.

The pride and cohesiveness these wives felt regarding their military status bonded them strongly together as a unit, but this distinction also made them feel like outsiders in civilian society. LBJ’s “Keep Quiet” policy separated the women still further from their civilian peers.

When tensions began to rise in the Gulf of Tonkin in August of 1964, Sybil expressed her dismay, noting:

“Being a navy wife was a hell of a way to live. Every night I dropped into bed exhausted by tension. Even in a crowd I felt lonely and different.” - *In Love and War*

The women’s frustration with the Johnson administration’s line on POWs and MIAs, and concern for their husbands reached a breaking point, and by 1968 they began to speak out and increasingly pressure the government to do the same. By doing so, they changed what it meant to be a supportive military wife.



Jim and Sybil Stockdale as a young couple with children Jim and newborn Sid, ca. 1954. Courtesy Stockdale family



Paul and Phyllis Galanti. Courtesy Judi Clifford and Connie Richeson



Jerry and Jane Denton, right, with friends Ralph and Doris Beatty in Villefranche-Sur-Mer, France. 1954. Courtesy Doris Beatty

WESTERN UNION		SENDING BLANK	
AIR MAIL		CHARGE TO	
SPECIAL DELIVERY		23 JULY 1965	
WASHINGTON, D. C.		PAGE ONE OF TWO	
Mrs. Jane Denton			
3125 Watergate			
Virginia Beach, Virginia			
<p>As you were previously advised your husband, CDR Jeremiah A. Denton Jr., USN, has been missing in action since 18 July 1965 when his aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire. A report just received states that this occurred in North Vietnam and your husband was observed to land in a small village area. It is with utmost regret I must inform you that the report further states that the extensive search by the Navy and Air Force has failed to locate any trace of your husband since 18 July 1965. In the absence of conclusive evidence of his fate he will be continued in a missing status pending receipt and review of a full report of the circumstances surrounding his disappearance. You may be certain that you will</p>			
COPY TO: COMFIVE NAS OCEANA			
Send the above message, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to			
PLEASE TYPE OR WRITE PLAINLY WITHIN BORDER—DO NOT FOLD			
1269—(R. 4-55)			

Telegrams, along with visits from their local military staff, confirmed their husband’s missing or prisoner status. Courtesy Denton family

“Wives influence their husbands in many ways, and the excellence of a man’s performance of duty has a direct relationship to the happiness and stability of his home life.”

— Nancy Shea, in *The Navy Wife*, 1965

Keeping Quiet, Going Public

*“Night — dark, dark, dark night with the Johnson administration —
Bright sunny days in the Nixon administration.”* — Sybil Stockdale, in a 2000 oral history interview

Under President Johnson’s “Keep Quiet” policy, men’s wives and families were advised to say nothing to anyone except close family about their husbands’ POW or MIA status. Naval intelligence officer Commander Robert S. Boroughs, known as “Uncle Bob” to many of the POW/MIA, secretly worked with many of the women to code letters to their imprisoned husbands. He also asked some of the wives to wear wiretaps to collect information on the home front.



Naval portrait of Robert S. Boroughs, ca. 1960. Photograph. Courtesy Bob Boroughs Jr.

In 1969, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Capen urged the new Nixon administration to drop the “Keep Quiet” ban and allow the POW/MIA families to speak out with the American government’s support.

On May 19 of that year, Laird and Capen held a live, televised press conference in Washington DC. They announced to the world what the government had known for years regarding the POWs: they were being tortured, denied medical care, mail, and sufficient food. Worst of all, the North Vietnamese refused to identify the names of all the men they held prisoner.

This press conference opened the door for more women to come forward with their stories and organize formally on a national level. The Nixon administration was careful to support the League’s initiatives, while recognizing the importance of their independence.



Antiwar activists Cora Weiss, David Dellinger and the Rev. William Sloane Coffin Jr. tell the press that they will escort three American POWs from North Vietnam on September 7, 1972. The North Vietnamese announced the handover of these POWs to COLIFAM a few days earlier. NYP Archives via Getty Images

Unforeseen Alliances

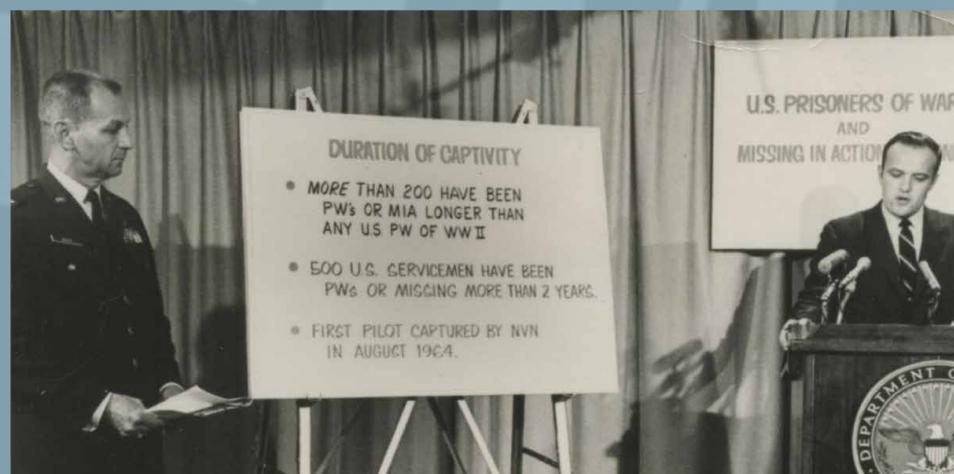
Once significant bombing of North Vietnam began in 1965, the anti-war/peace movement began to take shape nationally. Left-leaning intellectuals, veterans of the American civil rights movement, students on college campuses and former Vietnam veterans’ groups who opposed the war organized demonstrations across the country.

Despite their conservative stance on the war, and resentment of anti-war rhetoric, the women of the League increasingly intersected with antiwar activists as information from the government regarding their husband’s fates became scarce.

By the late 1960s, much of the information obtained about the POWs from Hanoi came from antiwar groups like Cora Weiss and David Dellinger’s COLIFAM (Committee of Liaison with Families) whose publicly declared purpose was the exchange of mail between the POWs and their families.

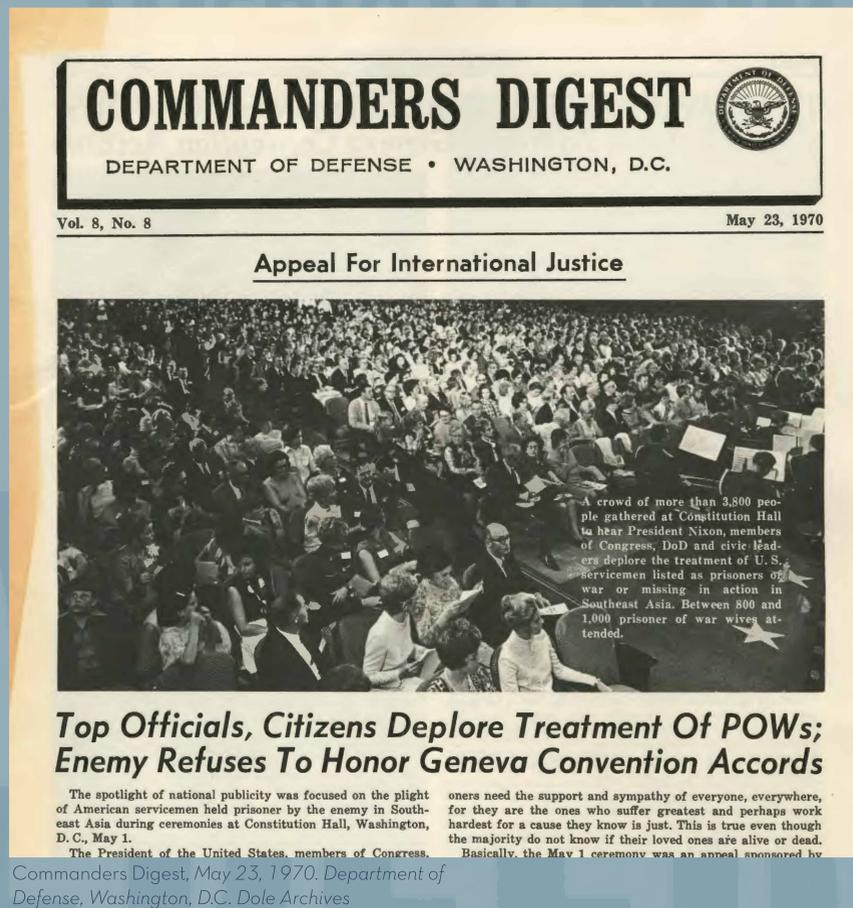
Many POW and MIA wives felt that relying on the antiwar/peace organizations to obtain information and letters was comparable to “making a deal with the devil.” But it was a bargain many were willing to make after years of hearing little from their own government.

Assistant Secretary Capen leads a press conference in May 1969. Courtesy Richard Capen



“Help, Please Help!”

— Louise Mulligan, in her May Day speech, May 1, 1970



Senator Dole speaks at the May Day rally. Courtesy Louise Mulligan

“Bob Dole was there from the beginning. We never could have succeeded without him. He has never given up on the cause.”

—Dick Capen, Assistant Secretary of Defense

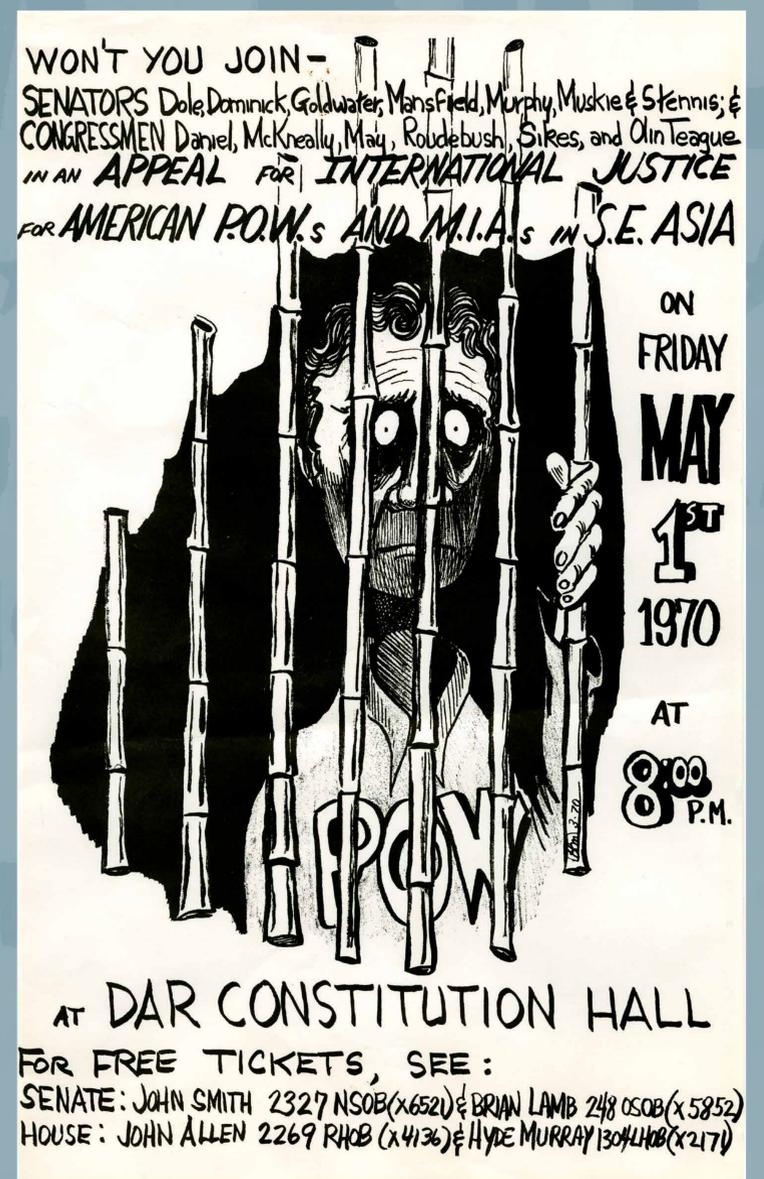
May Day Appeal for International Justice

Freshman senator from Kansas Bob Dole was one of the women’s few advocates in the beginning of their Washington awareness campaign. He delivered congressional support and recognition for the POW/MIA cause.

After an initial public rally yielded a disappointing turnout — only 300 attended and most were POW family members — Senator Dole, Sybil Stockdale and Louise Mulligan worked together to fill the DAR Constitution Hall to capacity. This time, they hoped for thousands of attendees, not hundreds. The effort succeeded when, on May 1, 1970, POW wife Louise Mulligan delivered an emotional speech to a hall filled with 3,800 supporters.

A Time of Unrest

On April 30, 1970, President Nixon made a televised address to the nation announcing his decision to cross the Cambodia border to fight the North Vietnamese. Reaction from the antiwar movement was swift; many college students organized massive demonstrations. Tragedy ensued at Kent State University: on May 4, four unarmed students were shot and killed by the Ohio National Guard during an antiwar demonstration. Ten days later, two unarmed students were also killed by city and state police at an antiwar rally at Jackson State University in Mississippi.



Poster promoting the Appeal for International Justice event. Dole Archives

Senator Robert Dole of Kansas

Representative Thomas Downing of Virginia

Allies &

Sybil Stockdale, Phyllis Galanti, and Helene Knapp all traveled to Europe to promote the League and POW MIA awareness. They hoped to confront North Vietnamese diplomats in Paris and Sweden at their consulates to demand the American POWs' release and to obtain official lists of the prisoners and missing. Phyllis, Sybil, Assistant Secretary Capen and Senator Dole were among those who raised the possibility of interning the POWs in the neutral country of Sweden.

"She was controlling them and the situation. I don't know how she knew to do that, but she did!"

—Judi Clifford, Phyllis Galanti's best friend and companion on her March 1971 trip to Sweden



This story was completed when these two ladies were interviewed upon their return from Paris and Geneva. However, due to a shortage of space, was not run until now.

TRIP WAS A SUCCESS - Two tired, but confident Colorado Springs wives returned from a fruitful trip to the Geneva Conference where, as part of a delegation of wives, mothers and relatives of American prisoners-of-war and missing-in-action servicemen, they contacted delegates to the conference regarding treatment of their men. Above, they are Helene Knapp, wife of Col. Herman L. Knapp and Mary Dodge, wife of Lt. Col. Ward K. Dodge, both servicemen listed as missing in action in Southeast Asia. The two wives returned to Colorado Springs May 31.

Mrs. Knapp, who speaks French and Vietnamese, acted as spokesman for the group from this area. There were, she said, a total of 174 persons in all who went to the Geneva Conference and, later to 13 countries, including Paris and the Peace Talks. Alabama had the largest delegation, it being 21 persons. Mrs. Knapp is area coordinator of Colorado Springs for relatives of POWs and MIAs. The organization is sponsored by local POW-MIA groups and Cadets to Aid Families of POWs. The latter is comprised of students at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Of the group leaving from Peterson Field, four were from Denver and one from Wyoming. Mothers went via commercial aircraft. Purpose of the delegation in going to the Geneva Conference was to make known to signatories of the Geneva Convention the plight of American servicemen missing and attempt to get those countries to back requests for better treatment and accounting for prisoners by the North Vietnamese.

Title of the Geneva Conference was "Conference of Governmental Experts on Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Rights which are applicable on Armed Conflicts." It was closed to legal experts representing 30 countries, all of whom had signed the Geneva Convention. Mrs. Knapp said she did not believe North Vietnam or East Germany had delegates there but other countries had as many as five representatives in attendance.

When asked whether or not she felt this trip accomplished more than the other delegation which went to the Paris Peace Talks from Colorado Springs last year, she replied that she did because "We had a definite place to go and a definite reason for being there. Men - legal experts representing 30 nations were present. In all, POW and MIA representatives

told their story effectively. We made an impact on the Conference; treatment of PIOs and MIAs was not on the conference agenda, but it was brought up - not by the American delegate - and discussed."

13 countries contacted, Vigil at Paris -

According to Mrs. Knapp, members of the group travelling to the Conference contacted embassies in 13 countries and maintained a Silent Vigil outside the Peace Talks in Paris. In most instances they received sympathetic, courteous treatment from ambassadors whom they hoped would pass their story on to countries they represent.

At the silent vigil at the Paris Peace Talks which began when the first delegate entered the building and lasted until the last one left for the evening, PIO and MIA representatives were joined by other Americans as well as by French people. In one instance, she related, a brave wife traveled to Poland by herself, but received a cool reception and returned downcast and sad.

In Madrid, Spain, Mrs. Knapp told the press, delegates received the most sympathetic treatment. There were 40 pressmen at the news briefing and they were in every Spanish newspaper. Ordinary people on the street would walk up to the delegates, put their hand on their arm and say, "We're so sorry."

Also contacted by wives and mothers were representatives of the International Red Cross, international labor organizations, Mr. Habib, second in command of the American delegates to the Paris Peace Talks, and the World Council of Churches.

Mimes, Knapp and Dodge were assigned to cover Switzerland, Sweden and London. The Swedish officials gave them a bulletin with a photograph of 7 American prisoners of war, which, according to Mrs. Knapp, "was obviously a propaganda piece" put out by the North Vietnamese. Photos showed a group of happy, smiling men in good health.

Impressed by U.S. State Dept. Rep -

The ladies were impressed with Mr. Habib's reception of them. He answered all their questions in a direct fashion, and said he would stay as long as was necessary to give them any information he could.

Mr. Habib assured the ladies that he felt peace would come. If he did not, he would not dedicate so many years of his life to that end, he told them. He felt they could be sure eventually that all American prisoners of war would be returned to their families.

"Now I understand why the United States government cannot set a definite withdrawal date for our troops in Vietnam and say they cannot do more to have our men freed. Regarding the Peace Talks, the North Vietnam are dedicated to complete withdrawal without conditions and release of prisoners is a condition. To set a definite withdrawal date would be very dangerous. The Red Cross is an international organization and can go only so far in pressuring the other side which could easily refuse to deal with it at all and say 'we don't need you'". Mrs. Knapp explained.

When asked about criticism of President Richard Nixon's actions by relatives of men missing in the Vietnamese war, Mrs. Knapp replied, "I understand their frustration - we all have that; however, I don't believe now that since we have waited this long, we can assume we know more than the U.S. State Department or Mr. Habib, who has spent so much more time with these people than we have. I think they are doing all they can."

While members of the 174-person delegation could not attend the conference since it was closed to delegates from countries present, all of whom had signed the Geneva Convention, they did contact delegates as they came and went from the convention.

Contact w/Communist-type unpleasant -

Mrs. Knapp related that since they had been told to talk to anyone and everyone they could, she approached one British-type man en route to the conference hall with a "Nice day, isn't it?" He replied crisply "And who might you be?" When she told him she was one of the 174 representatives from the United States and wanted to talk to him about MIAs and PIOs in North Vietnam, he brushed her off with, "Did you bring wives of Vietnamese men missing in action with you?" "I wish I could have," she answered. "Too bad you couldn't, because it would have been much fairer," he retorted and stormed away. Feeling that she couldn't give up and let him get away, Mrs. Knapp followed him down to a small tobacco shop and after he had made his purchase again approached him. "May I speak to you for just a moment," she asked. "No," he answered, "I didn't come to this conference to talk to the likes of you - I have no time for you," and again stormed off. That, Mrs. Knapp said, was her first encounter with a Communist type and it wasn't pleasant.

However, the event did not go unnoticed and one of the American delegates to the convention passed the word that "measures would be taken".

Europeans not aware of PIO-MIA problem -

Mrs. Knapp told the press that people in Europe do not know the story of American prisoners in Vietnam. While in London it was suggested that since 13 of the American servicemen are married to British brides, these women be brought into the picture and publicized. However, she said, after their visit to London, the problem was discussed in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

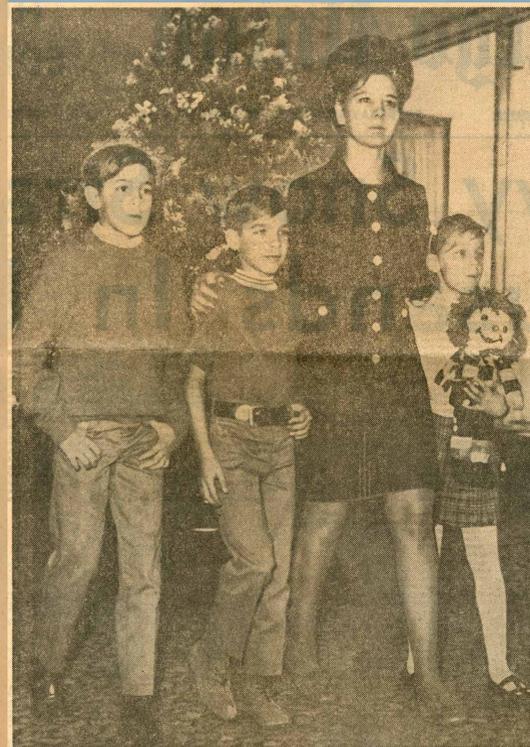
Although not assigned to do so, Mmes. Knapp and Dodge attempted to talk to the North Vietnamese delegate to the Paris Peace Talks, without success. With a man from Iowa, they went to the Embassy about 6:30 p.m., Friday night. Mrs. Knapp tells the story: "When I knocked, a porter came to the door and I spoke to him in French asking if I could come in and speak to someone for a few minutes, to which he sort of shrugged and said he would see. He left and in a moment or two came back, followed by a man with a glass in his hand, but I could see his attitude had changed. They had probably looked out the window and saw some of our people with American flags sticking out of their pockets. My first thought was, 'Oh, my gosh, they're going to ask me in for a cocktail.' The man following with the glass in his hand came close enough to take a good look at me and went on downstairs. The porter said curdly, 'Don't you know it's 6:30 p.m. and the embassy is closed? No only will see you, it's after hours. Come back Monday.' 'I can't come back on Monday - will you give these letters to your ambassador?' I asked. He took the letters and when we turned to leave, he opened the door and threw them out on the sidewalk. We started taking pictures of the place and the letters and the police came around and said we'd have to move on. I told them we were not going to leave until we had finished taking pictures which we did and then we left. I felt we had a job to do and I was not going to leave until it was done."

Two of the delegates went to a Catholic Mass in Paris at which the priest from Southeast Asia preached and at which people from that area congregated. During the time the Americans were there, however, the priest did not appear, Mrs. Knapp said. She did not have a full report on that attempt at time of this press conference.

She said that the mother who traveled to Sweden and France received excellent television coverage in both countries. This was the first time any American had gone directly to Sweden regarding this matter, Mrs. Knapp said.

The Geneva Conference ended June 3, according to Mrs. Knapp, and she would be kept informed of results forthcoming from that event.

Page A-19 Advertiser and News, August 18, 1971



The family of an Army major missing in Vietnam walks across lobby of a New York hotel after trip to Paris to seek information about him from

the North Vietnamese. From left are Bruce, 10, Bryan, 9, Mrs. Bruce G. Johnson, and Colleen Joy, 7. Johnson was reported missing in June, 1965.

Children Subdued On Flight To Learn Lost Fathers' Fate

Newspaper clipping, "Trip Was A Success," Advertiser and News, August 18, 1971. Courtesy Helene Knapp

Sweden's prime minister, Olaf Palme, ultimately declined to intern the American POWs, fearing negative reaction from Hanoi. But thanks to Phyllis's efforts in Stockholm, and other League efforts in Paris and Geneva, the world was watching the POW/MIA situation.

The POW Issue Becomes Political

The National League began to fracture into splinter groups as peace talks between the United States and North Vietnam continued into 1972. Groups like POW/MIA Families for Immediate Release, led by former League member Valerie Kushner, decided to take a more political stance to further their goals.

Swedish newspaper clipping, "Allt jag begär är att få återförenas med min man (All I ask is to be reunited with my husband)." March 1971. Courtesy Judi Clifford and Connie Richeson

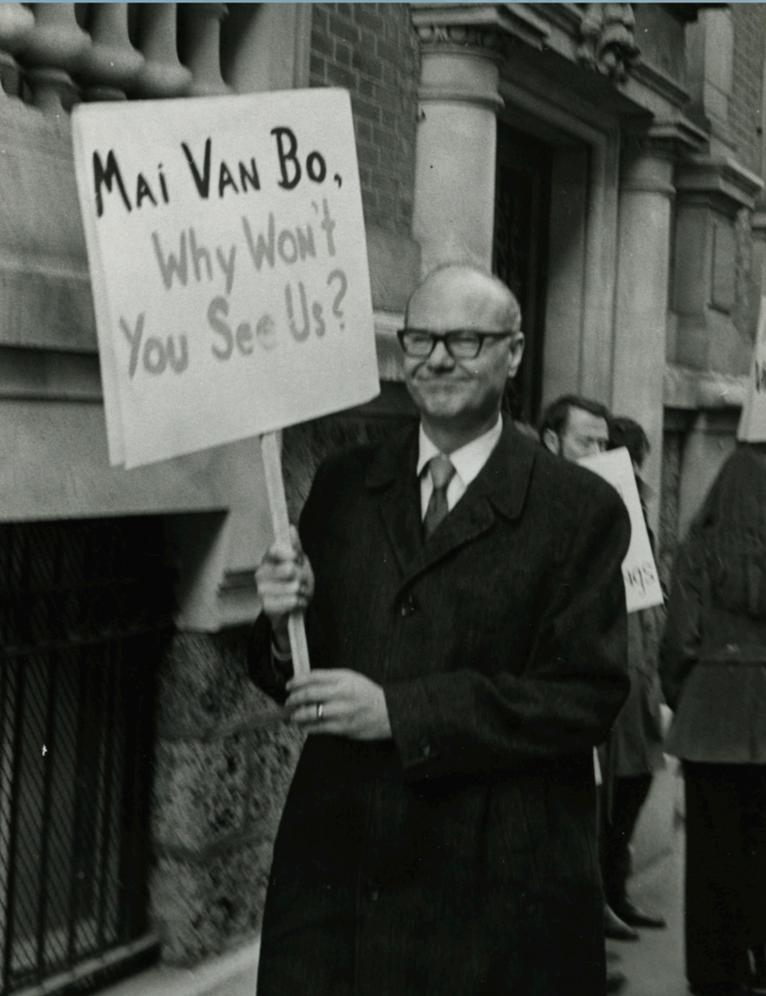
**"ALLT JAG
BEGÄR ÄR
ATT FÅ
ÅTERFÖRENAS
MED MIN
MAN . . ."**



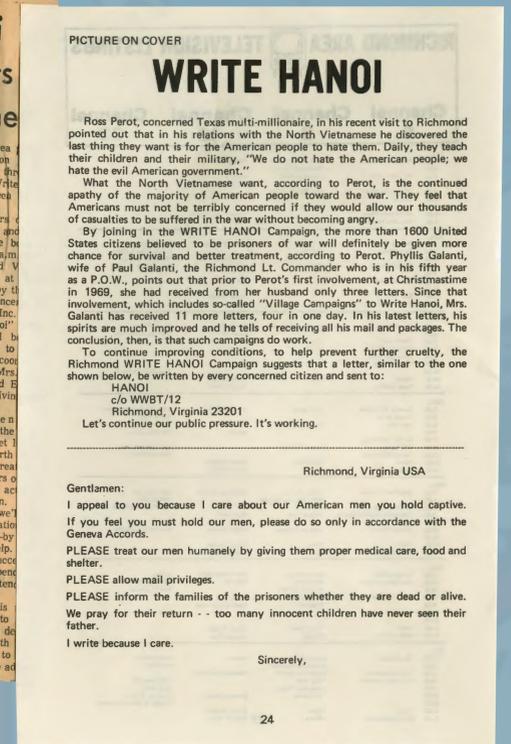
Mitt namn är Phyllis Galanti från Richmond, Virginia, och jag har kommit till Sverige för att söka Er hjälp. Min man, kapten Paul E Galanti är krigsfånge i Nordvietnam.

International Action

Telegraph and letter-writing campaigns were tools to demonstrate support for the POW/MIA issue through sheer volume. Led by Sybil, the POW/MIA families deluged the new Nixon administration with telegrams in a "Telegraph In," demanding that Nixon make the POW/MIAs a top priority, while the "Write Hanoi" campaign led by Phyllis Galanti and the American Red Cross sent truckloads of letters to the North Vietnamese government.



In December 1970, Colorado Springs Vice-Mayor Larry Ochs, Russell, Kansas native and friend of the Dole family, traveled to Paris on behalf of area POW/MIA wives and families. Their delegation delivered 125,000 letters of support for the POWs to the North Vietnamese embassy. Ochs was a supporter of the POW/MIA cause throughout the war. Photos by Judy Jenner, of the Colorado Springs Sun newspaper. Courtesy Helene Knapp



Ross Perot formed a close alliance with the POW/MIA wives, flying them to Paris to confront the North Vietnamese, paying for national ad campaigns and exhibits to pressure the Hanoi government on the POW issue, and speaking about the POW/MIAs across the country. Ross Perot and Phyllis Galanti featured on the cover of This Week in Richmond, ca. 1971. Courtesy Judi Clifford and Connie Richeson



Trucks were filled with letters as a result of the 'Write Hanoi' campaign. Courtesy Judi Clifford and Connie Richeson

The "Christmas Bombing" of Hanoi in December 1972 and the subsequent signing of the Paris Peace Accords on January 27, 1973 brought an end to US combat in Vietnam. The US, North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the Viet Cong signed the Paris treaty, which included provisions that all prisoners of war be released and returned home and that all missing soldiers were to be accounted for by the North Vietnamese to the fullest extent possible.

Many Returned Home,

After the Paris Peace Accords, Operation Homecoming brought 591 American POWs home between February 12 and April 4, 1973. Most POW wives left the National League immediately, leaving the MIA wives to continue their efforts to ensure accounting for their missing husbands. The North Vietnamese refused to provide the fullest possible accounting for missing Americans despite their agreement to do so in the Paris Peace Accords.

Brings Happiest Week

The Virginian-Pilot

Saturday, February 17, 1973 Section B



Louise Mulligan

forevermore"—while Mrs. Galanti said that her spouse is excited about going skiing.

Mrs. Galanti added that her husband talked about skiing during a phone call Monday shortly after his release from North Vietnam. "He told me to get ready."

Since their return to this country, the former prisoners have expressed shock at everything from revisions of the Catholic Church to Women's Liberation, their wives noted.

Mrs. Mulligan said: "I think the biggest shock has been that society as a whole has changed. The mood of the country has changed."

"Also, the Catholic Church to my husband—this has been a very great shock," the Navy wife added. "I'm not quite sure. He might try to revise it again, but I guess he's ready to accept it for right now."

Mrs. Mulligan said that her husband has shown great interest in color television and other "little things that we take for granted."

Mrs. Denton said that her aviator spouse, who proclaimed "God bless America" upon landing in the Philippines from Hanoi, is disappointed with the nation's drug problem.

And for Galanti, "the most overwhelming thing right now is being free," his wife said, adding that he has talked a lot about President Nixon's trip to China, Women's Liberation, and the now-ended Apollo space program.

During her husband's imprisonment, Mrs. Mulligan was a frequent critic of President Nixon's handling of the Vietnam War.

Asked about this Friday, she said: "Let's face it, we were all very anxious during this war. There were many differences of opinion. What I would like to see, and what my husband would like

(See Happiest, Page B3)



Jane Denton



Phyllis Galanti

'Moment of Truth'

Families of POWs and Missing Apprehensive, Cautious, Happy

By Ken Ringle and Donald P. Baker

Washington Post Staff Writers

For the families of the nation's 545 prisoners and 1,154 men missing in action in Southeast Asia, news of peace proposals brings apprehension as well as cautious hope and joy.

For the majority are relatives of the missing—those servicemen who simply disappeared on a night patrol or from a crippled plane somewhere in Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia during the past eight years.

For them, the crucial issue in the reported peace

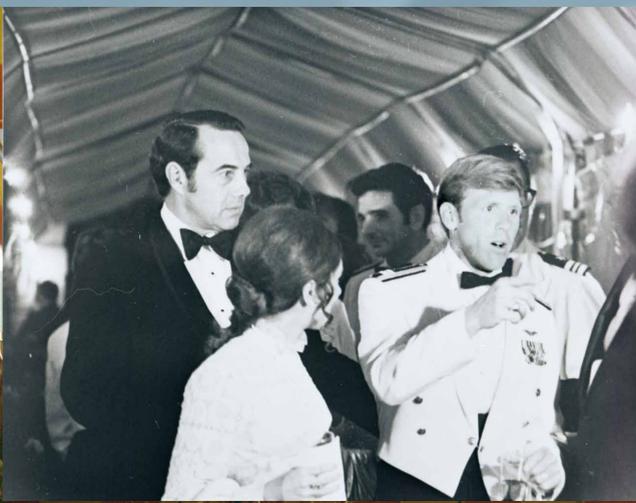
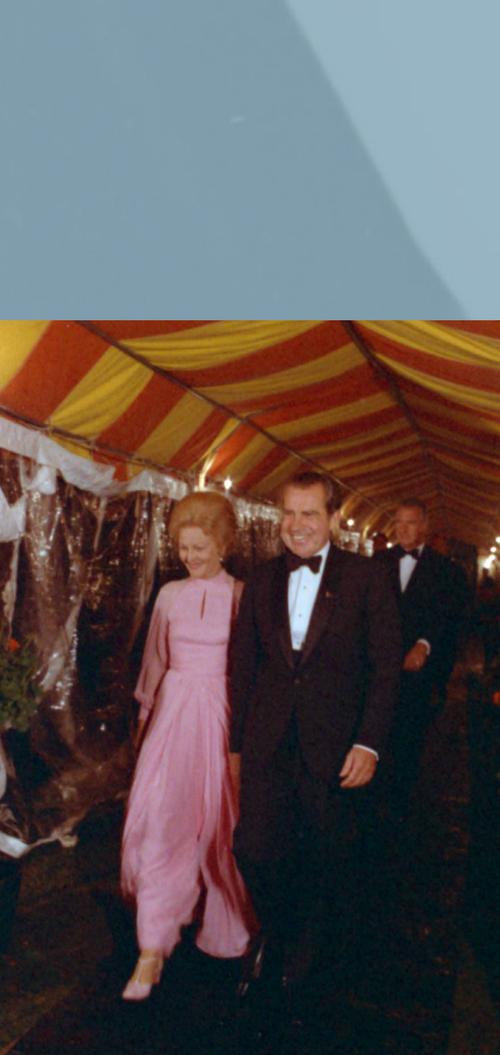
Phyllis Galanti's "head is spinning" at the news that she may soon be reunited with her husband, a Navy lieutenant commander. "But we've been stung so many times, I've talked myself out of being excited."

Joe McCain, whose brother is a prisoner, put it this way: "We're not exactly running out and buying Christmas trees."

For some families, any news will be better than not knowing whether they have a husband, brother or son

The Virginian-Pilot, scrapbook excerpt. Courtesy Merriann (Boroughs) Lynch

Newspaper clipping, "Moment of Truth," Washington Post, ca. 1973. Dole Archives



Senator Bob Dole, left, and returned POW Air Force pilot James Latham and his wife, Sue. Dole Archives

On May 24, 1973, President and Mrs. Nixon gave their now-famous POW Welcome Home Dinner at the White House. It is still the largest state dinner ever hosted by the White House. President Nixon's official toast honored not the POWs or the MIAs but their wives and families. Courtesy Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum

Many More Still Wait

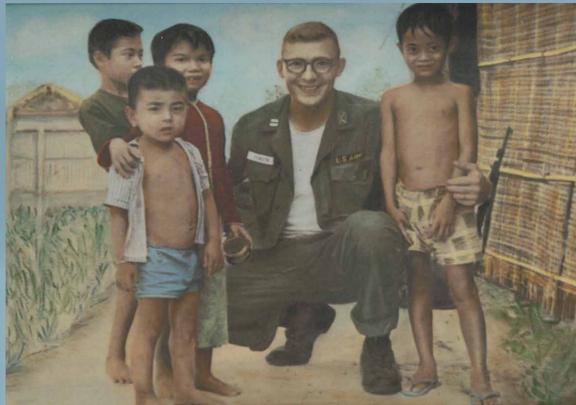
The Search for MIAs

Agencies still exist to serve the families of those Missing in Action in Vietnam, including the US government's Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's (DPAA). The DPAA continues to search for the remaining 1,617 military personnel still missing in Vietnam, as well as those missing from all other American wars.

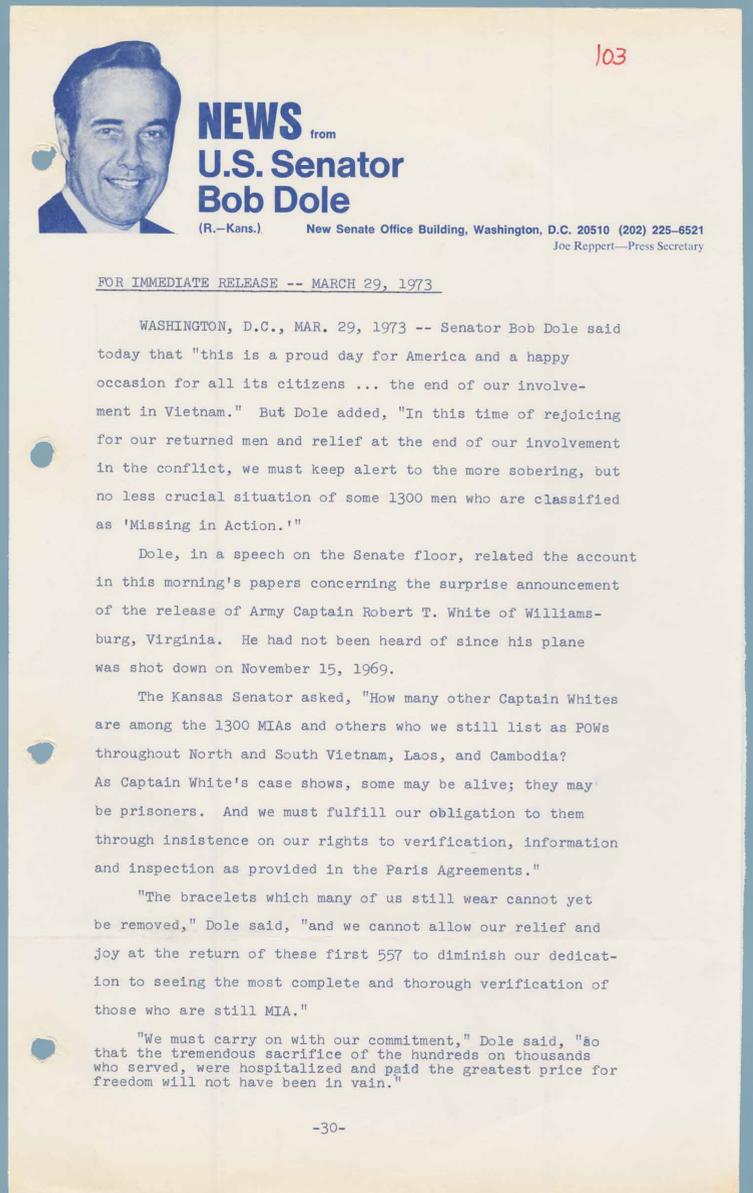
Today, the National League of POW/MIA Families sole mission is to obtain the fullest possible accounting for the missing and repatriation of all recoverable remains of those who died serving our nation during the Vietnam War. MIA sister Ann Mills-Griffiths was the Executive Director of the League from 1978-2011 and continues to serve today as the League's CEO.



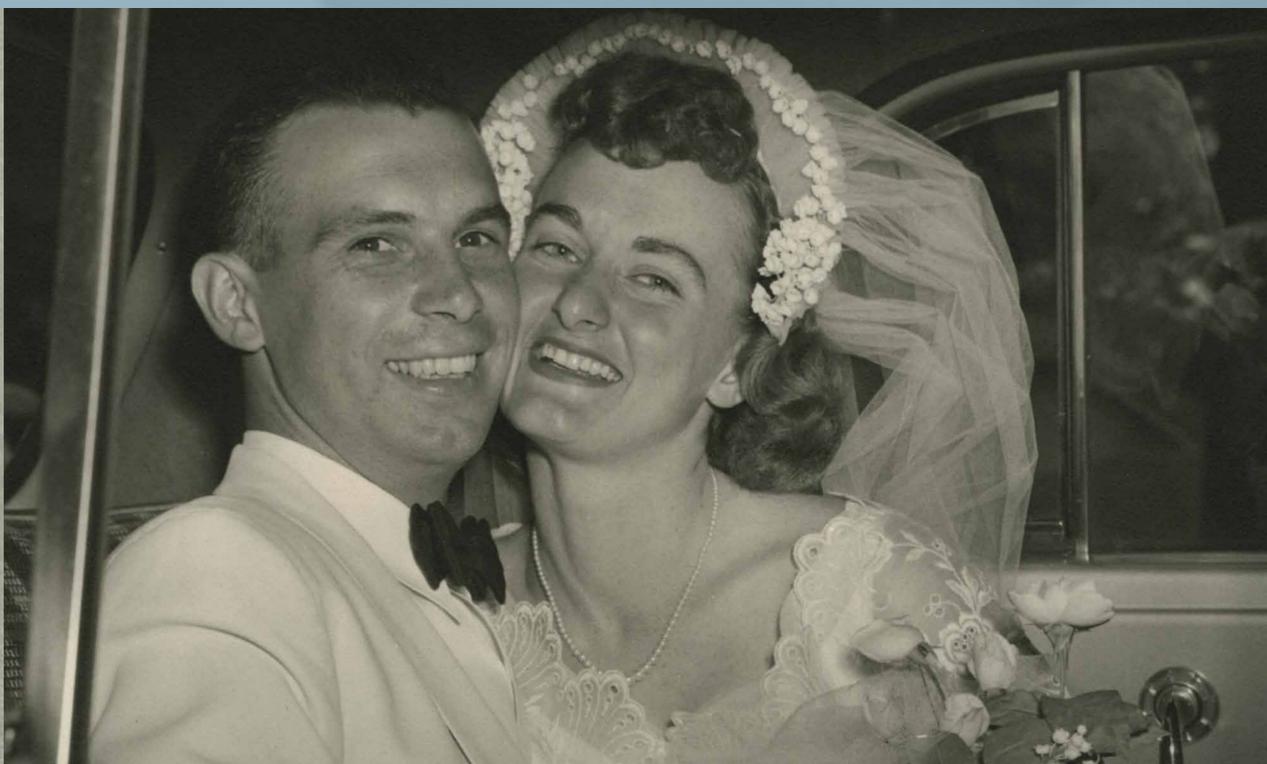
Christmas seal, ca. 1971. Organized by Helene Knapp in Colorado Springs, sales of seals went to the National League. Courtesy Helene Knapp



Major Bruce Johnson served at Fort Riley, Kansas before his tour of duty in Vietnam. Reported MIA on June 10, 1965, Major Johnson remains one of the longest MIAs on record. Courtesy Kathleen Johnson Frisbie



Senator Dole pledged his unwavering support for the MIAs after the Vietnam War ended. Dole Archives



Colonel Knapp in uniform (left) and Herman and Helene Knapp on their wedding day, June 1952. Courtesy Helene Knapp

"More than 1300 men are still missing, still unaccounted for. My husband, Colonel Herman L. Knapp, is one of these men."

— Helene Knapp, testifying before Congress on May 30, 1973, regarding Americans Missing in Action in Southeast Asia.

The League of Wives: Vietnam's POW/MIA Allies and Advocates

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