Prisoners' Wives appeal for help

by lucille howard 10/21/70 Blacksburg

Their plight is tragic and their appeal is fervent. Yet they appear poised, confident and even optimistic.

While the description may seem trite,

to aid a nation-wide campa
treatment and release o
prisoners.

Issuing the appeal to
sparse crowd--composed

About the National League of Families *and* The POW (Prisoner of War)/MIA (Missing in Action) Flag*

On a snowy morning in January 1966, Evelyn Grubb (1931-2005), mother of three and pregnant with a fourth child, was at home in Petersburg, VA. when a knock came at the front door. A Western Union driver handed her a telegram informing her that her husband, Air Force Captain Wilmer Newlin "Newk" Grubb (1932-1966), was shot down while flying his reconnaissance airplane over North Vietnam. Shocked by the news, her sons, Jeffrey (9), Roland (5), and Stephen ("Van") (2), sought help from the neighbors. Newk Grubb was declared Missing In Action (MIA). Uncertain about whether Newk had survived the crash, Evelyn was stunned when a friend phoned her weeks later to tell her that he had seen Newk, clearly alive, in a photo published a U.S. newspaper. That photo portrays a Vietnamese nurse tending to Newk's wounds while soldiers stand behind him with fixed bayonets (see back of this brochure for the photo). Naturally, the hope of Newk's survival was rekindled and Evelyn began laboring for the day on which she would be reunited with her husband. Newk's status was changed to Prisoner Of War (POW) on February 21, 1966. Evelyn soon became a formidable activist as she banded together with other wives and families of the imprisoned and missing to create the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia ("League"). Founded by Sybil Stockdale (1924 -2015), and comprised primarily of the wives of POW/MIA, the League lobbied governmental officials to provide information about their missing husbands, and to enforce the 3d Geneva Convention which concerns the humane treatment of POWs. Eventually, Evelyn ascended to position of National Coordinator of the League. In that capacity, she petitioned the United Nations, reminding member states of their legal duties towards POWs under international law. In February 1973, surviving POWs were returned to the U.S. as part of "Operation Homecoming." Newk was not among them. The League continued their fight for a full accounting and to ensure that all remains in North Vietnam were returned to the U.S.. In March 1974, Newk and others were disinterred from various North Vietnamese grave locations and returned to the United States. Today, Newk and Evelyn Grubb are buried alongside each other at Arlington National Cemetery.

Cadet Newk Grubb, Penn State University. 1955

In 1970 Mary Hoff (1931-2015), mother of five, also received a telegram informing her that her husband, Navy Commander Michael G. Hoff, was shot down over Laos. Mary wanted a symbol that helped to communicate her family's identity as a family of the Missing. Her vision was of a stark, black and white flag. Hoff worked with Newt Heisley, a World War II veteran, to design the flag. With input from Mary, Newt designed the POW/MIA flag to include the "You are Not Forgotten" language, betokening the moral duty to bring all soldiers home. Mary subsequently brought her design to a local chapter of the League, which embraced the flag as the symbol of their movement. Evelyn Grubb presented the flag to Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird in 1972 (the photo on the cover of this brochure captures that occasion). Unlike Evelyn who was able to realize some closure with Newk, Mary Hoff died without ever learning about the fate of her husband.

ABOUT THE DEFENSE POW/MIA ACCOUNTING AGENCY (DPAA) & PFC JOHN SHELEMBA

Beginning with the U.S. Civil War, women and families have lobbied the U.S. government to provide an accounting of their missing family members. The sad fact is that a system of accounting, including the use of "dog tags," had to be developed. This was done only after citizens agitated during the Civil War (1861-1865). 100 years later, the National League of Families built upon that earlier thread of effort. Today, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) (dpaa.mil) continues the work of accounting for missing U.S. personnel, fulfilling a moral duty that took over 100 years to fully ripen. The DPAA has identified a number of Michiganders in recent years, among them PFC (Private First Class) John Albert Shelemba of Hamtramck. PFC Shelemba went missing during the Korean War during the battle of Taejon, South Korea on July 20, 1950. He was 19 at the time. Unknown remains "X-251 Taejon" were buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii. In 2018 these remains were disinterred and identified as PFC Shelemba. PFC Shelemba finally returned to Michigan in 2021, and was buried in Great Lakes National Cemetery in November of that year. Governor Whitmer lowered all flags in Michigan to half-staff to honor the sacrifice of PFC Shelemba and his family. To learn more about PFC Shelemba, visit: dutytoremember.com.

About POW/MIA National Recognition Day

The first recognition by the U.S. Government for Prisoners of War and Missing in Action was established by President Nixon who proclaimed a "National Week of Concern for Americans who are Prisoners of War or Missing in Action" from March 26 through April 1, 1972. Subsequent Presidents recognized additional dates throughout the following decades, but in 1986 the third Friday in September was designated as National POW/MIA Recognition Day by President Reagan. In 2023, National POW/MIA Recognition Day falls on September 15. Central Michigan University first observed POW/MIA National Recognition Day in 2020 in order to educate our community about important issues of individual, national and international ethics. The ROTC (Reserved Officers Training Corps) Program, the VRC (Veterans' Resource Center) worked with faculty and students from the Department of Philosophy, Anthropology and Religion to produce a multidimensional educational experience. This tradition continued in 2021 and 2022. Podcasts, videos and other materials were produced with the family of PFC Shelemba and the team that identified him (discussed above). These materials and more can be accessed at: dutytoremember.com.

Above: The return of PFC John Shelemba, November 3, 2021.
Visit dutyroremember.com for video of homecoming and funeral.

Right: The "Missing Man" Table in Warriner Hall
Central Michigan University, October 2020.

**Text written by Dr. Hope Elizabeth May*

Evelyn Grubb with photo of her husband, Captain Wilmer N. Grubb.

U.S. Air Force Captain Wilmer N. Grubb as he appeared in the newspaper in 1966. A nurse appears to be rendering aid to him.

ROTC Cadets of CMU's Chippewa Battalion raise the POW/MIA flag with the U.S. flag on POW/MIA Recognition Day in 2020.

A MOMENT OF NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION

CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

SEPTEMBER 15 - OCTOBER 1, 2023

ROTC *Veterans' Resource Center*

The Dept. of Philosophy, Anthropology & Religion

dutytoremember.com