



WORK, FRIENDS AND FOES Voice: Fred W. McDarrah



Missing in Vietnam

Operation Next of Kin

by Bill Greenhut

On a crisp clear day, I set out in a green Army sedan for a small town in western New York. My perfectly tailored dress green uniform carried the shiny brass that included infantry crossed rifles on the lapels. On my epaulets were silver First Lieutenant's bars and over my left breast pocket the National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, and Purple Heart. My companion, similarly dressed, had recently returned from Vietnam.

The first time through we missed the town. We stopped to get our bearings, turned around, and came back. Needing cigarettes and directions, we parked and went into a small drugstore where we asked a girl cashier. The house was just a short distance away.

The street was lined with brick and shingle ranch homes. We found the right one, made a U-turn, and parked. As we silently got out, the lightness in my head accompanied the lump in my throat and the tightness in my chest. It was a short distance from the street to the door. I rang the bell. The door opened. The woman behind it had not been told of the news I bore but knew why I was there.

"On behalf of the Secretary of the Army . . ." I stammered. ". . . it is my sad duty to inform you . . ." I felt tears. ". . . that your son, in the Republic of Vietnam . . ." I never finished.

She invited us in as she whimpered. Her son was missing.

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Continued on page 20

Morton Rampant

How I voted Bella

by Frederic Morton

A two months' absence from New York makes you feel, returning, like a virgin again. Again everything shocks. The litter on Broadway, the sooty moist fog rated "Acceptable air," and the papers that tell you Bill Ryan has been dead for days.

I came back to the knowledge that men die, the very best of them, and that friends fight. The schism that ran all along the Hudson in June parted the very pavements again last week. I voted for Ryan in the primaries. It seemed the only good and just thing to do. But I didn't push my views in this column nor endorse the cause elsewhere. Partly because I'm not—not yet—a particularly political person or writer. Mostly because I didn't want to contribute, however inconsequentially, to a civil war between good guys.

But that abstinence, too, turned out to be a virginal illusion. The phone was re-connected; the

phone rang. I'd forgotten that last year the 67th A. D. had elected me to the Democratic County Committee, an ordinarily forgettable office, which now had to choose a successor to Bill Ryan. Calls came from district leaders to

Continued on page 10



Voice: Fred W. McDarrah

BELLA BUSSED

MARY NICHOLS VIEWS
THE ABZUG-RYAN RACE
(see page 15)

DROPPING IN
ON THE BEARINGS
(see page 77)

Continued on page 8

Next of kin

Continued from page 1

There was always hope. Neighbors came in. Coffee was made. Doughnuts were brought out. She commented on what a difficult job we had and how hard it must be on us. I did not know what to do with my eyes or hands. Every few minutes I held my breath and tensed my body to avoid losing control. Her daughter was called home. It was the girl who had sold us cigarettes and given us directions in the drugstore. She showed us pictures and told of the plans he had made

for his future after the Army. Then the mailman came with his last letter.

When we returned to the post I told the major I wanted to tell the family myself, if he was alive. Two days later he came in and said the body had been recovered. I did not go back. Send Westmoreland, or Johnson, or Nixon.

I had done it twice before. Once was in Niagara Falls. I woke a man in his 60s from a late morning nap. He was still groggy when I told him and he showed very little emotion. I was surprised but he explained he was the stepfather and hardly got to know his stepson before he was gone. He called the mother at work and told her. Although I knew I was supposed to wait for her to come home I did not.

The other time was on a sodden, gray day in Toronto. After a long miserable ride, my driver and I found the right address in a two-story garden apartment complex on the outskirts of the city.

The daughter of the deceased was listed as the next of kin. The woman who answered the doorbell was in her 20s but looked much older, probably due to the five children clamoring around her. I asked for the daughter. In puzzlement she asked why I came to see a two-year-old. Then my uniform became apparent and she began to cry. Through her tears she explained that the little girl was theirs. They had planned

to marry when he returned from Vietnam. After we sat and talked for awhile I told her I would have to notify his parents since his daughter was a minor. She offered to show me where they lived and called in a neighbor to stay with the kids.

We crossed through Toronto. During the ride she quietly sobbed while telling me she didn't get along well with his mother. We pulled up in front of an old run-down building. A narrow alley led to the rear where a staircase ascended through porches leading to the back apartments. As we entered the alley she began running and screaming. "He's dead! He's dead!" She emerged from the alley and turned the rear corner of the building, still screaming. Before I reached the corner I could hear an answering yell. "He's not! He's not! You're lying. He's not!" When his mother saw me in uniform she became hysterical. "Oh my God, it's true!"

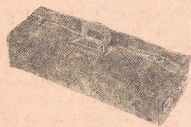
I went up the stairs as they continued shouting. As I reached the steps just below her porch she ran at me with her arms flailing, tears streaming from her eyes, shrieking unintelligibly. I grabbed her wrists to restrain her and she collapsed, sobbing in my arms.

I took her into the living room and asked if there was anyone I could call. Her daughter came in and the mother ran into the bedroom for a bottle of whiskey. The

daughter pleaded with her not to drink. Neighbors, hearing the commotion, began to arrive. One of them called the doctor. Other family members began to come home. There was a lot of confusion and I tried to keep out of the way. Most of the action was in the bedroom where the mother refused to give up the bottle. After her husband and the doctor arrived she fell asleep. I explained they would receive a confirming telegram from the Department of the Army within 24 hours. Another officer would be in touch about funeral arrangements and financial benefits. I left.

On the way home we stopped for dinner. I ordered a beer and the waitress asked me for proof of age.

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Norton

Continued from page 3

impressively demonstrate in the last go-round with the construction industry.

Ms. Norton would probably make an excellent negotiator with that industry—certainly better than the man who did it the first time, then Deputy Mayor Richard

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