

Loretta Ferguson holds children Deborah and Keith and wonders what effect their father's disappearance will have on their lives. Airman James Ferguson (left) was shot down by the Reds, who deny having information on him.



Back!

The next thing I knew, Margaret was sitting on the bed beside me. Shortly after Captain Tarbucks had left the office, she told me, a second report had come through. Sergeant Kresge had rushed home to bring it to me. The Russians reported finding only six bodies! They knew nothing about the other five crew members.

Like someone in a dream, I got up off the bed and walked back into the living room. I felt hope swelling again. Jim had to be among those five! The medical officer helped me to a chair and reached into his pocket for a small white envelope.

"You're doing very well," he said, "but in case it gets too bad, these will help you sleep a little."

I never did use the pills, but it was good to know that I had them.

THIRTEEN days later, Russia returned the six bodies, which were flown to Frankfurt for the slow job of identification by military doctors.

It had now been nearly a month since Jim disappeared. Captain Tarbucks suggested I return to the States. I didn't want to. It seemed like deserting Jim. I knew I must be there when he came home. The captain left it up to me.

"But supposing Jim does come out alive," he said. "He would be flown to the States immediately. You're getting closer to the time when the baby will be born. A few more weeks and the doctors won't let you go. Jim might be sent to the States and you'd have to stay here."

That convinced me. Three days later, Deborah and I, with an escort sergeant, boarded a chartered plane for the United States. It was a rough trip. The plane was jammed with returning military wives and children, and Debbie was restless. At New York, bad weather closed in the airport and I became violently airsick. Then came another flight to Indiana, a missed connection, and worst of all, the feeling of being farther and farther away from Jim.

Debbie and I moved in with my folks in La Porte,

and I began to learn to live with telegrams. I feared each would contain the fatal words that would finish my hopes for Jim. But they were all painfully similar and impersonal:

"REFERENCE YOUR HUSBAND A/2C JAMES E. FERGUSON JR . . . PROCESSING OF UNKNOWN REMAINS IS STILL NOT COMPLETE..."

"REFERENCE YOUR HUSBAND . . . NO FURTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE . . ."

"REFERENCE YOUR HUSBAND . . . NO INFORMATION IS YET AVAILABLE . . ."

"REFERENCE YOUR HUSBAND . . . REMAINS WILL NOW BE MOVED TO UNITED STATES FOR FURTHER PROCESSING . . ."

"REFERENCE YOUR HUSBAND . . . SPECIALISTS ARE STILL PROCESSING THE UNKNOWN REMAINS . . ."

For a month I received two or three torturous telegrams a week. Then on Nov. 3 came welcome news: "REFERENCE OUR PREVIOUS CORRESPONDENCE CONCERNING YOUR HUSBAND . . . PROCESSING . . . HAS BEEN COMPLETED . . . YOUR HUSBAND WAS NOT AMONG THOSE IDENTIFIED . . ."

A letter followed stating Jim would be "held in missing-person status until his exact status was determined or a review of his case by the Secretary of the Air Force indicated he could not have sur-

vived." Then he would be listed as "presumed dead," and I would be declared a widow.

MY BABY BOY was born on Dec. 14, and I named him Keith Edward as his father had wished. The birth was rapid though complicated. He was a big baby, and the doctor did not get there till it was half over.

Having a baby when you don't know if your husband is alive or dead is intolerable. My self-control dissolved under the anesthetic. I screamed and cried for Jim. The next day, I began to hemorrhage. Ten days and four transfusions later, I was released from the hospital, but I am still under a doctor's care.

The Government announced a special report to the nation for noon, Feb. 5, last year. We gathered at Jim's folks to hear it over the radio. The announcer was excited. The Government had a tape recording of the Russian fighter planes shooting down Jim's unarmed transport.

Jim's mother and I just looked at each other. We had been sure the plane had been shot down and that the Government had known it all the time. We began to wonder if they would ever do anything. We couldn't understand why they had waited until after Anastas Mikoyan's visit to the United States to release this information.

With Jim missing, presumably behind the Rus-

(Continued)