



Her airman-husband was shot down
18 months ago over Russia

and never heard from since;
now, as Mr. Eisenhower prepares to visit the U.S.S.R., she pleads:



Lorena 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.



Help Me Get My Husband Back!

By MRS. JAMES E. FERGUSON, JR. as told to Mary Pankowski

MY HUSBAND is an American airman, missing in action. He was shot down by the Russians Sept. 2, 1958. No word has ever been received from him. I don't know where he is, or if he is even alive.

For more than a year, I have known only the agony of waiting. Even hope has been denied me in recent months. But maybe I have reason now to hope again. In June, President Eisenhower will visit Russia. It's a remote hope, but possibly he will be able to learn what the Russians did with my husband.

I must not hope too much, though. When Premier Khrushchev visited Washington last year, the President personally inquired about the fate of Jim and four of his crew also missing. The President later wrote me:

"To my deep regret Mr. Khrushchev's reply has failed once again to provide any new information. . . . In spite of this I assure you that the government of the United States will continue to do everything that can be done to determine the fate of those missing men."

Perhaps, then, there still is reason to hope. Perhaps in June something will happen to end my agonized waiting.

It is not easy to be neither wife nor widow. I have two children to raise—three-year-old Debbie Ann and one-year-old Keith, who was born after his father vanished in a remote region near the Russian-Turkish border. What faces us in this in-between world we live in? How will endless waiting affect us? How will it affect Jim when he returns? And what if he doesn't return?

I do not think I am presumptuous to hope that the world leaders will consider how important these questions are to one woman and her children. They are not great summit questions; yet they fill our lives. At least I must hope that Mr. Khrushchev and Mr. Eisenhower will take time from complex questions to try to answer my simple ones.

Jim's and my story began on a happier note in

March, 1958, when he arranged for us to join him overseas. We rented a small house in a German village not far from Frankfurt and lived pretty much like any other couple—except Jim's job was flying over the most dangerous air routes in Europe.

On Sept. 2 that year, I was alone with my little girl, waiting for Jim to return from a routine flight to Turkey. In the afternoon, I was putting on water for some tea when a blue Air Force car pulled up in front of our house. Another followed. Two officers, grim and silent, came up to our door. My heart skipped, I recall, but I convinced myself this was nothing to worry about.

One of the officers was Captain Tarbucks, Jim's commanding officer. The other was introduced as Major Swanson from the air base at Frankfurt. "I have some news for you," the major said softly, and I knew this was the news every flier's wife dreads. "Why don't you sit down?"

"What's happened to Jim?" I insisted. They had little information. Jim had been aboard an unarmed transport returning to Adana, Turkey. The plane and its 11 crew members were missing. Beyond that, they knew nothing. When any further news came in, they would let me know.

They stayed about 10 minutes. They gave me a phone number to call and asked if I had enough money. They asked if there was anything they could do for me. Then they left.

FOR MINUTES, I sat stunned and helpless. Then suddenly I grabbed my little girl and ran out the door into the narrow street, stumbling on the rough pavement. Joyce, a neighbor girl of my own age, called to me, and I ran to her. Still clutching Debbie, I gasped out the horrible news.

Joyce helped me back to my house, and, somehow, I finished making the tea. An hour later, I had gained control of myself and accepted the news. After all, Jim was only "missing." There was hope. He would come back to us, I was sure.

We had just finished dinner with Joyce that night when Sergeant Burgeron from Jim's outfit drove up. "You've got to come to the base, Rita," he said. "It's no good for you to be out here alone."

I didn't want to go. The house held all that Jim and I had built together. "I'll be okay," I said.

"There's more to it than you," he replied. "You're five months pregnant. Suppose the baby came early? There's Debbie to think about, too. You'll be better off at the base, and when any news comes you'll get it faster."

I protested that I didn't know anyone at the base. How could I move in with strangers?

"It's all arranged," he said. "You're to stay at Sergeant Kresge's."

Sergeant Kresge was on the ball team with Jim. I had met him a few times. I had never met his wife. I looked at Deborah. Without understanding what had happened, she had sensed this alien feeling that had come into her home. It would be better for her elsewhere.

"I'll go," I said.

I gathered up the few things we would need for the night. The sergeant said we could come out the next day to get anything else we needed.

Margaret Kresge welcomed us as if she had known us all her life. An only child, she had never been around babies very much. Stanley, their son, was four months old and teething. We talked babies. We fed babies. We washed babies. I kept as busy as I could. And I waited.

For 10 days there was no news. Then, on Saturday morning, as I was dressing Debbie, Captain Tarbucks came to the house with a medical officer. They said Russia had found the plane and reported all aboard dead.

Still holding Debbie, I walked into the bedroom and collapsed on the bed. I had never let myself cry before—now I couldn't stop. There was no hope after all. My husband was dead.

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-

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