

LANCASTER WELCOME

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HEY, IT'S ME! -As Navy Lt. David George Rehmann and his mother walk toward crowd at Palmdale Airport, in photo at left, Mrs. Evelyn

Heinevetter, far left, a friend and former neighbor, waves to attract Rehmann's attention. At right, she gives the former POW an embrace. Times photos by George R. Fry

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POW 'Paraded' in Hanoi Comes Back to the Real Thing

BY ROBERT KISTLER

Times Staff Writer

Six years and 62 days ago, Navy Lt. David George Rehmann—his broken right arm slung painfully at his side—was prodded down the streets of Hanoi before the eyes of his enemies.

Photographs of Rehmann's "parade" that day were distributed by Hanoi to the world in an attempt to depict the folly of continued American fighting in Vietnam.

Saturday, David Rehmann was in another parade. Thousands of friends from his hometown of Lancaster and the surrounding Antelope Valley were there.

It was, simply, a grand, old-fashioned, humdinger of a day . . .

The cheers had begun to roll across the apron at Palmdale Airport before the jet loaned by Lockheed Aircraft Corp. had inched to a stop.

Escorts His Mother

As the 30-year-old bachelor radar intercept officer escorted his mother, Mrs. Catherine Rehmann, down the short deplaning ramp, the volume of cheers, yells, applause and screams became deafening.

Various police estimates put the number of the throng at between 3,000 and 4,000. However many there were, they all seemed to come unglued.

Rehmann, tears welling in his eyes and his still-imperfectly healed arm nestled at his side, moved to a microphone as youngsters from his old high school struck up "God Bless America." You could almost hear the music.

Grateful for Support

"You'll never know how much your support got me home and will bring home the others," Rehmann said. "God love you and thank you."

There was more applause and shouts from old friends jumping up and down nearby. "David . . . David . . . Hey, David . . ." one woman screamed.

Rehmann continued,

"My tour in Hanoi was spent for you," he said. "And for my God and my country."

Then the hometown boy who had been shot down on Dec. 2, 1966, while aboard his F-4 Phantom on a raid over Hanoi, melted into the onrush of humanity.

And David Rehmann was, finally, home—hugging people, grabbing their outstretched hands, and trying desperately to sign all the bumper stickers, pieces of paper and "Wel-

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GIFT -Navy Lt. David George Rehmann waves from car presented to him by residents of Antelope Valley.

PARADE

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come Home" programs thrust his way.

After some of the wild jubilation subsided, Dr. Marshall Mercer, one of the welcoming committee planners, presented Rehmann the keys to a 1973 metallic orange Corvette, a gift from the people of the 2,500-square-mile Antelope Valley.

For six weeks, David Rehmann bumper stickers had been sold for \$1 apiece and, by now, the little orange and black signs stuck to many a vehicle in the area.

More than \$10,000 had been collected, a spokesman said, and what is left over (the money is still coming in) will be used to create a permanent memorial to the area's war dead.

100 Cars in Line

From the airport, a line of more than 100 cars moved through the streets of Palmdale and Lancaster, stopping here and there for Rehmann to say a few words, shake a dozen or so hands, and, in two instances, lay a wreath at the base of a war memorial.

Throughout the winding, 18-mile motorcade, Rehmann displayed an amazing recall of old faces and, in most cases, the names that went with them.

He and his family had moved to the Antelope Valley in 1954 and David had attended elementary, high school and two years of college in the area.

In addition to his mother, other family members with him Saturday included his sister, Jeanette, an elementary teacher in Lancaster, and his four brothers, Tom, Jim, John, and Don.

One Absent

However, one member of the Rehmann family was not present.

David's father, John, died while the officer was captive in North Vietnam. Rehmann had had no hint of his father's death until letters from his mother began arriving signed, "Love, Mom" instead of "Love, Mom and Dad."

But, Saturday, Rehmann's thoughts were of happier things. And, there were still more people to meet and more hands to shake.

Then, after several days leave, he will return to Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego where he has been since his Feb. 17 return.

The doctors there say they have more work to do on his arm.