

One in a Million

On February 18, 1966, Myra Spencer of Earlham, Iowa, received a telegram delivering the news that her son Lieutenant Larry H. Spencer—a Navy radar intercept officer—was classified as missing in action after his plane failed to return from a mission to Thanh Hoa in North Vietnam. Later communications confirmed he had been captured by the North Vietnamese when his F-4 Phantom was shot down over the Gulf of Tonkin, and with these events the Earlham native became Iowa's first Vietnam prisoner of war.

During the seven years of her son's captivity,

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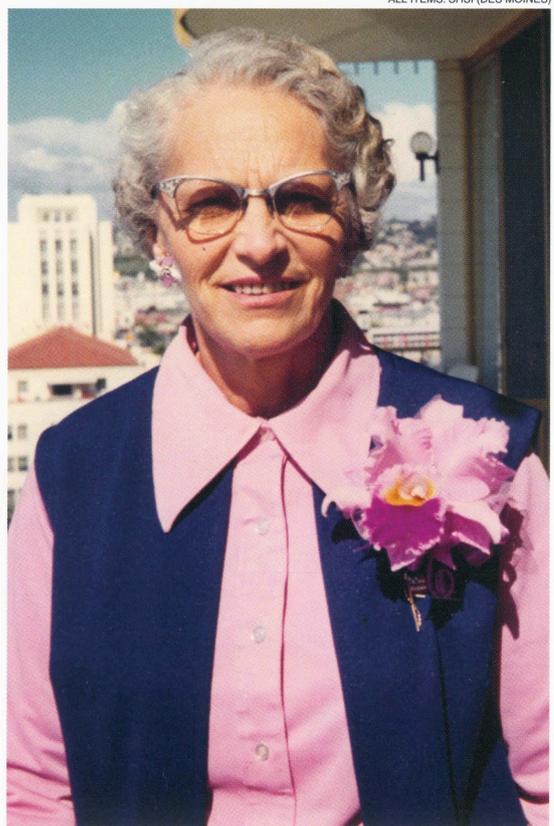
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Myra Spencer (right) emerged as a spokesperson for POW/MIA causes through personal appearances, letter-writing campaigns, and active participation in the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, and Iowans Care for Prisoners of War and Missing in Action.

In her free time she faithfully compiled scrapbooks (above) to document her activism and record the political, media, and community response to POW/MIA issues. She hoped to someday present this record to her son as a testament of what she had done on his behalf during the anxious years of separation. That hope became a reality when he was released from his Hanoi prison in February 1973 as part of Operation Homecoming.

In 2010 Commander Larry H. Spencer donated the series of eight scrapbooks assembled by his mother to the State Historical Society of Iowa so that they can continue to commemorate not only the captured and missing service personnel of the Vietnam War, but those at home who did not allow them to be forgotten.

—Becki Plunkett, Special Collections Archivist



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