



VIVIAN JOHNSON for The Columbian

Gwen Davis shows the bracelet she wears in memory of her brother, Capt. Harley Hall, a Navy pilot shot down in Vietnam on Jan. 27, 1973. Although the government has declared him "presumed killed in action," Davis and her family members hope he may be alive.

# Hope flies high for pilot

35 years after Harley Hall was shot down, some family members believe he's still alive

By DEAN BAKER  
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**G**wen Davis was getting ready for church in Vancouver in 1973 when the telephone rang. She learned that her brother Harley Hall's F-4J Phantom fighter jet had been shot down on the last day of combat in the Vietnam War. He was missing.

The call came from Harley's pregnant wife, Mary Lou, in San Diego and it started a hopeful vigil that continues today. The

hope will be amplified Sunday, the 35th anniversary of the incident.

Several family members and friends believe the stalwart Navy pilot — once the commander of the elite Blue Angels flying team, an astronaut candidate, and a graduate of Evergreen High School and Clark College — may be alive.

Perhaps he lives in Russia or Vietnam. Maybe he's assumed a

## Update

■ **Previously:** On the last day of American hostilities in Vietnam, jet pilot Harley H. Hall, a 1955 graduate of Evergreen High School and a 1957 graduate of Clark College, was shot down. He was listed as missing in action.

■ **What's new:** On the 35th anniversary of Hall's disappearance, some of Hall's family and friends cling to hope that he is alive.

■ **What's next:** Those who knew Hall will observe Sunday's anniversary, some by wearing bracelets with his photo.



# Hall:

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new identity. He'd be turning 70.

"He could have even forgotten the language," said Hall's niece, Jamie Butterfield, 43, of Vancouver, who still wears a bracelet to remember him. "He could have a new family."

Neither Davis nor Mary Lou Hall is convinced that Harley Hall is dead, despite the U.S. government's declaration on Feb. 29, 1980, that Hall was "presumed killed in action." In 1993, the Hanoi government returned three teeth and a few bone fragments to the United States. They were Harley's teeth, all right, Davis said. "But teeth aren't Harley."

After an investigation, the government reported that Hall probably died on the beach near the wreckage of his plane, and was buried there in a trench, his remains later scattered by scavengers.

## Family objections

Mary Lou Hall filed a formal, written objection to the government's contention that the teeth and statements gathered in Vietnam proved that Hall was dead. She argued the teeth could have fallen out due to malnutrition or might have been extracted. She contended a foot-thick file of government papers obtained through the family's use of the Freedom of Information Act indicate that he was taken prisoner and still may be alive.

The returned teeth bore signs of periodontal disease, indicating the pilot had survived some time after the crash. Two of the teeth had marks indicating they'd been extracted. X-rays proved only the teeth were Hall's, family members said.

"Be assured that my protest does not stem from 'wishful thinking,' hoping against hope, or reluctance or refusal to accept death as an inevitable, probable outcome," Hall said in her 1993 letter to the Department of Defense. "For years I have imagined, longed for and even dreamed of the day when I could hold a proper memorial service for Harley, when his earthly remains could rest in U.S. soil. Then



Hall family photo

**Harley Hall in the early 1970s, when he was commander of the U.S. Navy's elite Blue Angels flying team.**

his children and I could experience the peace of knowing, and begin to close the long chapter of grief. But to grant burial with full military honors and a full-size coffin to three front teeth would not only be ridiculous, but represent acquiescence in a lie."

Hall said the Navy told her two weeks after he was shot down that he had been captured. She learned through government documents that Hall was interviewed in 1978 by Russian intelligence agents in Vietnam.

She and Davis no longer expect to receive more information from the government, which has closed his case.

## Remembering Harley

Others don't know what to believe, but simply wish to honor a man who served three tours in Vietnam and was shot down by anti-aircraft guns just 10 hours before the cease-fire.

"I am one of probably many in the area who have not forgotten," said retired Camas teacher Doralee St. Clair, who had Hall's niece, Jamie, in her second-grade class. "I don't

wear the bracelet anymore. It has a lot of wear on it, but I can still clearly read his name."

"As the years go by, I think about him once in a while," St. Clair said. "I never knew him, but I knew his niece, Jamie, and I wore the bracelet for many, many years. I wore the first one down until it wore out and got a second one through Harley's mother in 1982 or '83 and that lasted longer. I wore it through my stay-at-home years, raising my little family, and through nursing school when I became an RN and then through years of working at Southwest Washington Medical Center."

Jamie Butterfield said she has the nickel-plated bracelet that her father, James Hall, made for her when she was 7 years old. It still fits but is worn.

She now wears a red bracelet instead. Her son, Marc Butterfield, 20, also wears a bracelet, even though he never knew his great-uncle.

"He has grown up with the stories," said Butterfield. "He wears his bracelet every day. I've taught the stories to him and he has passed it down

the line. He is very aware and done papers about it in school. Remember, the French from World War II had people who were prisoners for 40 or 45 years. You never know."

## Last casualty

Across the country people remember, said Gwen Davis. "It's people that we never even knew that are still wearing his bracelet," she said. Some pick up bracelets at veterans events, such as those held at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

In Hazel Dell, a 60,000-square-foot office building at 10000 N.E. Seventh Ave. bears his name. It was built by developer Larry Pruitt, who attended Clark College with Hall. It features a memorial atrium with a 12-foot-tall glass panel etched with an illuminated likeness of Hall that rises from a pool of cascading water. A second panel features four jets flying in a missing-man formation.

"Harley's wingman, Terry Heath, saw Harley go down, saw that he was on the ground, had disengaged his chute and was running along the beach," Davis said. "The government told us then to keep our mouths shut, not cause any waves, that Harley would be home. When the POWs and Harley's co-pilot came home in March of '73, that was the red flag for me."

The co-pilot, Lt. Cmdr. Philip A. Kientzler, refused to talk to the family, Davis said. She believes he was told by the government to remain silent. He told investigators that Vietnamese guards told him Hall had been killed shortly after the crash. Kientzler died in 2005.

Years later, there were reports that the Viet Cong had bragged about parading a "Big Blue Angel" through the streets of Hanoi.

Hall has gone down in history as the last Navy casualty of the Vietnam War. He is known as the last American to be classified as a prisoner of war in Vietnam.

But, for the family, that's not the end of the story.

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