

Parade culminates in Vietnam vets

welcoming home gulf vets

By **JOSEPH LOUDERBACK**
Staff Writer

The dream became a reality for Vietnam veteran Bob McMahon Saturday when sun-drenched skies highlighted the return of Delaware County's Desert Storm troops.

Crowds representing every Delaware County municipality from Rutledge to Rose Tree turned out

for a welcome home parade McMahon engineered with fellow Vietnam veterans to make up for thanks they did not receive some 20 years ago.

Local politicians and members of dozens of U.S. Armed Forces units, fire companies and civic organizations marched in the 2-mile parade from State Street in Media to the amphitheater at Rose Tree

Park on Route 252.

The most passionate moment occurred at the park when Vietnam veterans welcomed the Persian Gulf soldiers home individually, some saluting, some shaking hands, others embracing.

"Seeing them pass the flags on to the next generation was very special," County Council Chairman Mary Ann Arty said.

McMahon, who arrived in Vietnam at the height of the 1968 Tet offensive, said the U.S. and MIA flag exchange was the idea of fellow veteran Jeff White.

"It was a symbolic gesture of remembering the men from our time and the nine MIA's from Desert Storm," McMahon said.

A similar, larger flag ceremony is planned on Philadelphia's Ben-

jamin Franklin Parkway on July 4.

Rep. Curt Weldon (R-7), who fired up the home front with a similar parade in February, thanked all those attending who served their country.

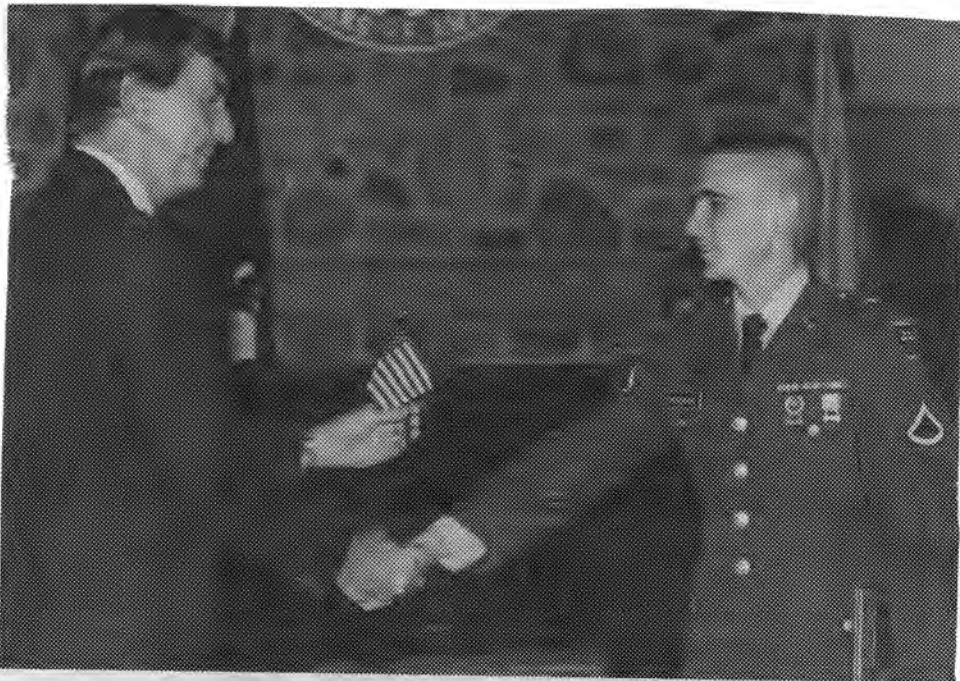
"This is a day of cleansing for all Americans," Weldon told the crowd perched on the hillside.

"No longer will you be considered a second-class citizen,"

Weldon told the Vietnam vets.

McMahon, who also serves as a Media Borough councilman, said handling the logistics of such a large parade took prayer and careful planning, but everything went pretty much on schedule.

"We are all glad to have them home and will never forget the sacrifice all soldiers make," McMahon said.



Passing The Torch

Vietnam veteran David Moore passes an American flag and a POW-MIA flag to Persian Gulf veteran Vince Murtaugh during a "passing the torch" ceremony at the Welcome Home dinner where each Vietnam veteran gave each Persian Gulf veteran the two flags. (Town Talk photo by P. Kelly).