

Parade, park ceremony honor its hometown heroes

By ADAM TAYLOR

Of the Times Staff

UPPER PROVIDENCE — Approximately 1,000 people gathered in the amphitheater at Rose Tree Park yesterday for a ceremony at the end of the "Mother of All Parades" which honored the local veterans of Operation Desert Storm and tried to heal the festering wounds of those who served in Vietnam.

Hundreds more lined the route of the parade, sponsored by Delaware County's Vietnam War veterans, which started at the Media Courthouse at 10 a.m. and ended at the park.

In the procession were soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division and other troops, local fire companies and police departments, high school marching bands, floats carrying support groups comprised of relatives

who served in Persian Gulf War, various businesses, politicians and judges.

At the amphitheater, prayers, songs and speeches preceded the day's highlight — a flag-passing ceremony from the Vietnam to Desert Storm vets.

U.S. Rep. Curt Weldon (R-7) called the day a "cleansing for Americans."

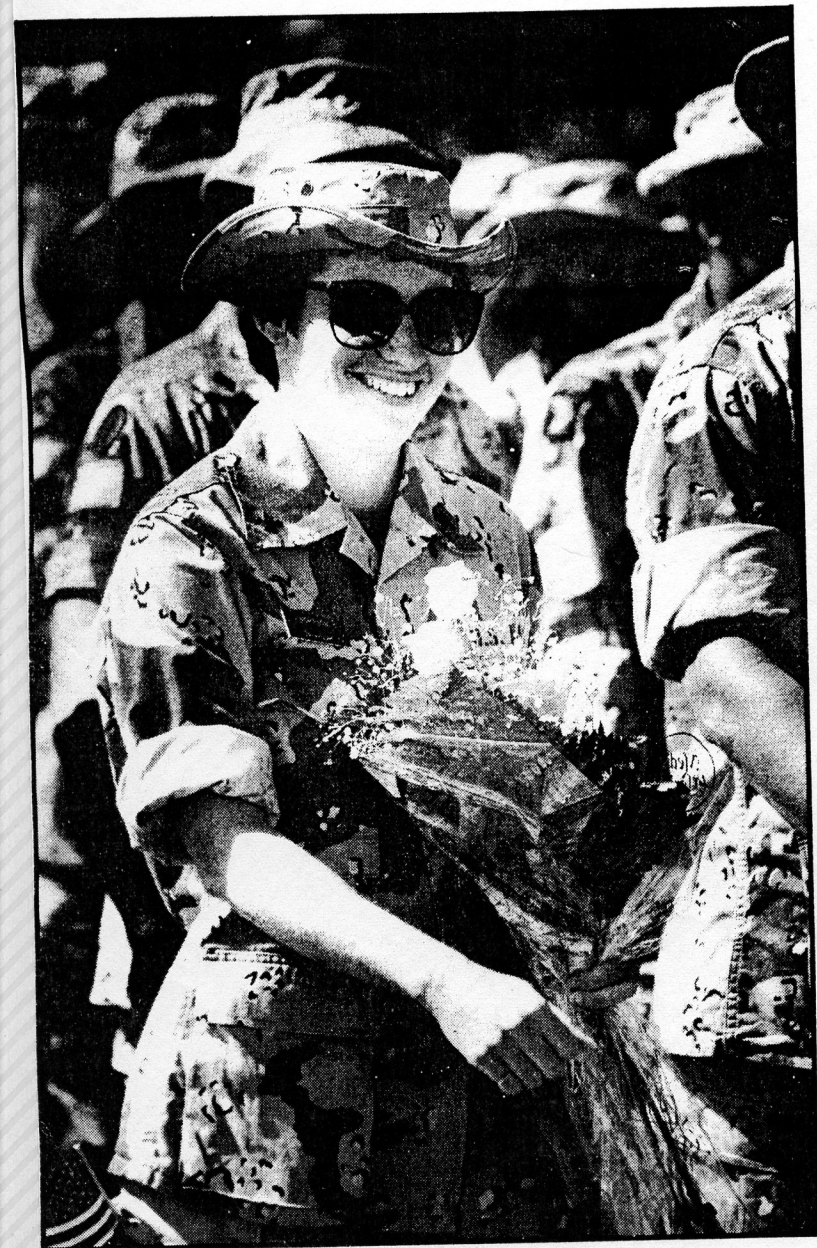
"This is not just for our Desert Storm troops, although they are our honorees," Weldon said. "We have somehow blamed our GIs for policies they had nothing to do with setting, especially our Vietnam veterans."

One by one, almost 100 veterans of the Persian Gulf War met a Vietnam vet at the center of the amphitheater's stage. They saluted each other and the Vietnam vets handed the younger soldiers an American Flag and a Prisoners of War/Missing in Action flag.

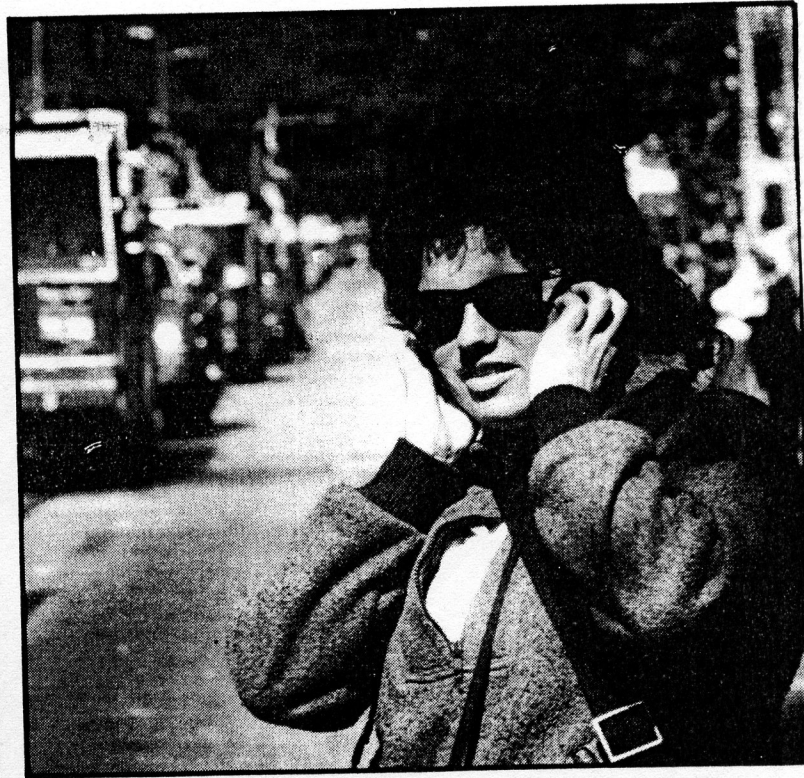
"Becoming a veteran carries with it the dual responsibilities of welcoming home all future service personnel and never allowing another generation of veterans to be forgotten," said Media Councilman Bob McMahon, who served in the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. "Through their acceptance of the POW/MIA flag, the Persian Gulf War veterans continue the resolve of veterans and American citizens alike to insist upon the fullest possible accounting of U.S. service personnel from past, present and future conflicts."

McMahon said the event for the soldiers in the Middle East conflict was the first one in the country to be sponsored by Vietnam veterans. He called for identical flag-passing ceremonies to be conducted throughout the country on July 4.

On an almost cloudless day with temperatures in the 70s that speakers called "glorious," families and



Times staff photo by ROBERT J. GURECKI
Connie Morrison of Parkside, a triage officer with the FH-15 Naval Hospital Unit marches along Providence Road — roses in hand.



Times staff photo by ROBERT J. GURECKI
Adrienne Paston of Brookhaven finds the sirens too much as the parade snakes its way along State Street in Media.