

Three Fine Daughters

SERGEANT JOHN HANNAH, who won the V.C. at the age of 18 and died at 25, was a modest man. But he would be proud today. Proud of the wife and family he left at 87, Stonehill Avenue, Birstall. Proud of their courage, their ambitions—and their happiness.

For attractive Mrs. Janet Hannah has made a good life for a hero's children. Nine years ago, the outlook was grim for Mrs. Hannah. At 25 she was a widow with three children, Jennifer aged five, Josephine, four, and Jacqueline, a toddler of three.

THIS WEEK, SITTING BY A GLOWING FIRE AND SURROUNDED BY HER THREE STURDY DAUGHTERS, A PICTURE OF HER HERO HUSBAND ON THE WALL, MRS. HANNAH TOLD OF HER LIFE SINCE THE HOLLOW DAYS OF GRIEF. "I HAD TO SINK OR SWIM," SHE SAYS.

Her main ambition has been to educate the girls. Jennifer and Josephine now attend Loughborough High School, and Jacqueline is a pupil at Loughborough Covent High School.

Busy Household

"My husband's chief wish was for the girls to have good education, to appreciate the good things in life. Good schooling is helping me to bring them up," she says.

The three girls have ballet and tap dancing lessons and Jacqueline has music lessons. There is always activity in the Hannah household.

Mrs. Hannah has one outing a month alone, when she attends meetings of Birstall British Legion Women's Section. The family goes together on occasional visits to the theatre or cinema. They attend Birstall Parish Church. Mrs. Hannah feels that a sound religious background is an important feature in the education of her daughters.

She helps and encourages them to plan for the future. Jennifer, aged 14, would like a career in languages; Josephine wants to be a policewoman, and the "baby" of the family, Jacqueline, aged 12, wants "something to do with animals. Perhaps in the Pets' Corner at London Zoo."

Jacqueline is devoted to her fluffy black and white cat, Tinky. Mrs. Hannah does not care for cats, but tolerates Tinky for her daughter's sake. "After

Sergeant John Hannah, who won the V.C. at the age of 18 for extinguishing the flames in a Hampden bomber, returned to his own cockpit with a smile after recovering from his injuries.



Jacqueline, Josephine And Jennifer

all, they are all individuals and must develop their personalities," she says.

Sergeant Hannah received his Victoria Cross after fighting the flames in a bomber with his bare hands returning from an R.A.F. raid on Antwerp on September 15, 1940. Three years later he was invalided out of the service suffering from tuberculosis. He died in June 1947.

Mrs. Hannah supplemented her pension of about £4 by doing hairdressing for friends. The Leicester Mercury organised a fund to help make life easier for the fatherless family. "And the Ministry of Pensions and the R.A.F. Association have been good to me," says Mrs. Hannah.

She has had a difficult time being father and mother to the girls. It meant years of putting on a brave face to make them feel secure.

A Coincidence

But Mrs. Hannah feels that the girls take more looking after now than ever before. "It is full time work. And how they can eat! I don't now how mothers manage to go out to work and bring up a family."

When Mrs. Hannah was ill for five months a short time ago a neighbour looked after the girls while their mother was in Leicester Royal Infirmary. By a coincidence, she underwent operations performed by a V.C.—Lieutenant-Colonel John Barrett.

The three Hannah girls—Jacqueline (12), Josephine (13) and Jennifer (14)—with their mother, who is holding the case containing her husband's Victoria Cross. A painting of Sergeant Hannah is seen on the wall. It was the Victoria Cross which brought Mr. and Mrs. Hannah together. Noticing he was wearing the ribbon indicating the award, she spoke to him on a railway train. A friendship which led to marriage followed that meeting.



Mrs. Hannah has never considered marrying again. She does not want her daughters to marry before they are 21. "You miss a lot, and then it is too late when you are raising a family."

The girls like to tell the story of the romantic meeting of their parents.

IT WAS SHORTLY AFTER SERGEANT HANNAH HAD BEEN DECORATED WITH HIS V.C. AND WAS RECUPERATING FROM HIS INJURIES THAT HE SAW A PRETTY GIRL ON A TRAIN. SHE RECOGNISED HIS MEDAL RIBBON AND SMILED. HE BLUSHED. A FEW MONTHS LATER THEY WERE MARRIED.

Exactly six years later, Britain's youngest holder of the Victoria Cross died.

But his widow, who has so squarely faced the challenge to her own bravery, and those three fine children carry on the Hannah reputation for courage.