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THE PLIGHT OF AMERICAN POW'S

IN KOREA AND VIETNAM

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REPORT NO. 4211

THE PLIGHT OF AMERICAN POW'S IN KOREA AND VIETNAM

by

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Colonel, USAF

PII Redacted

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

December 1970

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AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH
REPORT SUMMARY
NO. 4211

TITLE: The Plight of American POW's in Korea and Vietnam

AUTHOR: William C. Norris, Colonel, USAF

The report describes some of the injustices committed against American POWs in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. In addition, this report evaluates how successful the United States has been toward achieving humane treatment for American Prisoners of War, and also how well the United States met its obligations to the American POWs as outlined in the "Code of Conduct."

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The US Fighting Man's Code, AFP-34-10-1 states,

> He (POW) is required at all times to safeguard any military information he possesses and to make no statements and take no action that might embarrass or discredit the United States. His indicated course of action is to remain firm but respectful. He can rest assured that the United States will act with vigor and speed to obtain his release. He can be certain that all of the resources of our Government will be brought to bear to this end.[1]

As one reads this official document prescribed by the President of the United States in 1955, it is very difficult to believe that it pertains to the American POW's held captive by the North Vietnamese.

It would be interesting to see if Captain Hayden J. Lochart, shot down 2 March 1965, or Major H. S. Morgan, shot down April 1965, both prisoners of war for over five and one-half years, would agree that the United States has acted with "vigor and speed," and with all of the resources of our government brought to bear for their release?

The United States has sent American armed forces into combat, at the risk of starting a world war, to protect South Koreans, and South Vietnamese. In addition, US forces have been sent to Lebanon and to the Dominican Republic to protect those people at the risk of

war. Finally, President Kennedy issued a critical ultimatum to the Soviet Union concerning the missile crisis in Cuba. This crisis could have very easily led to major war. But at no time has the United States been willing to take the slightest risk to save American fighting men who have fallen captive to our enemies.

It is understandable that during World War II very little could be done about POW's because of the equal balance of power between the combatants. But it is difficult to understand how two very small backward countries such as North Korea and North Vietnam can execute, torture, starve and imprison Americans; while the United States, the most powerful nation in the world, does nothing more than make formal protests and quote the 1949 Geneva Convention.

The United States' "stated" goals as they pertain to POW treatment are:

GOALS THAT APPLY TO CAPTURED US PERSONNEL

> The United States has sought to provide protection and humane treatment for its nationals in the hands of the enemy, and has continued to do so throughout its history to include the conflict in Vietnam. The manner in which this goal is achieved varies with emphasis placed upon its achievement. The emphasis is tempered by the legal, technological, political and ideological demands of the time and the nature of the enemy and style of combat.

> From time to time this goal has come into conflict with other goals which were accorded a higher priority. The milestones toward its achievement were realized more so between wars than during them. Nevertheless despite the variations and vacillations the protection and humane treatment of U.S. nationals has always been an important goal of the U.S.[2]

Looking back through American history it is very difficult to find a war where United States POW's were not executed, tortured, starved, and mistreated. Therefore the United States has never achieved its goals and unless policies change, captured American nationals never will receive humane treatment.

This report will show; first - that the United States has never achieved its goal to obtain humane treatment for American POW's; second - that the United States failed to meet its obligations to American POW's in the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF AMERICAN POW'S

What is happening to the American POW's in Vietnam is not new. The evolution of the treatment of US prisoners of war is a macabre story that encompasses extremes of cruelty, neglect, deprivation, and maltreatment of human beings. But what is discouraging is that our modern educated society has done very little to improve the life of the POW. For a full understanding of today's prisoner of war problem, background knowledge of the past is essential.

American Revolutionary War

The first war in American history was the Revolutionary War, and it did not set the example for improving conditions for POW's. It is estimated that 12,000 Americans died aboard British prison ships as a result of inhumane and cruel treatment.[1] During the war, George Washington did very little about the plight of American prisoners. He said:

> Exchange of prisoners though urged by humanity is not politic. It would give force to the British and add little to our own. Few Americans belong to the Army and the enlistments of those who do is nearly expired. We shall not exchange long-term "Red Coat regulars" for short term enlistees.[2]

In addition, Washington did not want to exchange healthy British for sick Americans.[3]

Conduct of American POW's in the Revolution also presented some problems. Desertion was widespread. As a result, to discourage desertions, the United States established the death penalty for those prisoners who, after capture, took up arms in the service of the enemy. Duress or coercion was recognized as mitigating only in the event of threatened immediate death. This was the first American definition of required prisoner conduct. The US disregard for American POW's held by the British, and at the same time establishing required regulations for prisoner conduct, has a ring of familiarity with modern times.

The American Civil War

The treatment of prisoners in the Civil War was no better than that experienced in the Revolution. The inhumane treatment became a major issue between North-South during and after the war. Thousands of prisoners died because of the atrocious conditions in Southern prisons. One such example was "Andersonville prison" in Georgia. Between February 14, 1864, and May 5, 1865, over 13,000 US prisoners of war died in this one prison alone.[4]

Once again the military conduct of the American POW was subject to question. Roughly 3,170 "Yankee" prisoners joined

the Southern forces, while some 5,452 men of the Confederate Army turned to the Federal forces.[5]

It might be worthwhile to remember these large numbers of defectors as a comparison may be made when discussing the Korean War in the next chapter, where American fighting men are accused of misconduct and of being turncoats.

World Wars I and II

The two great World Wars were quite different from each other in regards to prisoner of war treatment. For American POW's, World War I was the most humane war in history. The Germans captured 4,120 Americans of which only 147 or 3.5 percent died while in captivity. None of the POW's were condemned to death.[6]

However, World War II was a very different story. There were two issues; Americans imprisoned by Germany and Americans held captive by Japan. In Germany even though some American POW's were executed, it is estimated that only 1.1 percent died while in captivity.[7]

In Japan it was very different. Death marches, beheadings, torture, and starvation were common. Famous atrocious events such as: the Palawan Massacre, the Bataan Death March, and the execution of the Doolittle Flyers, became world known. As a result 40.3 percent of American POW's died in Japanese captivity.[8]

Prisoner conduct was not an issue. World War II was the "popular war." A great victory had been achieved. The treatment of the POW's especially by Japan had been so savage that any misconduct by American prisoners of war was forgotten.

In that war military force was used to the maximum as soon as it was possible, to liberate the POW's. Also, underground systems were developed throughout Europe to help POW's escape and to return to their respective forces. In addition, Japanese and German leaders guilty of committing atrocious acts were brought to justice.

1949 Geneva Convention

Many nations of the world were appalled by the horrible death toll of World War II. As a result they convened in Geneva in 1949 to attempt to define high standards for protecting and providing humane treatment of prisoners of war and civilians. Representatives from 61 countries, including the United States, Soviet Union, Red China, North and South Vietnam and other countries of the communist world, took part.[9] The basic provisions provided for the major points shown here; prisoners would be provided adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. They would be free from bodily harm, humiliating, or degrading treatment. Those examples are just a brief glimpse of what is contained in a rather lengthy document.

CHAPTER III

KOREAN WAR INJUSTICES

One of the darkest eras in the history for American POW's was the Korean War. In 1953, 4,000 survivors of the unknown thousands of Americans who had fallen into enemy hands were repatriated. They had survived years of savage inhuman treatment inflicted by North Korean and Red Chinese captors. However, upon returning home to America the POW's were once again subjected to mistreatment. This time the maltreatment came from fellow Americans in the form of propaganda and unjust criticism of their conduct while held prisoner. The theme of this propaganda was that there had been wholesale collaboration by the American POW's with their communist captors.

The Americans that led the criticism against the US POW's focused their attacks on three areas; first, that the Korean War was the first war in which American POW's were guilty of morale breakdown, collaboration with captors and misconduct; second, that the communist treatment of American POW's was not too severe; third, that a very large number of POW's were guilty of serious collaboration and misconduct.

Behavior of American Prisoners

Mr. Eugene Kinkead wrote many of the articles and a book criticizing American POW's in Korea. In his book titled In Every War But One, he states;

> In every war but one /that is Korea/ that the United States has fought the conduct of its servicemen who were captured and held in enemy prison camps presented no unforeseen problems to the armed forces and gave rise to no particular concern in the country as a whole.[1]

Betty Friedan, author, has seen the average Korean prisoner as an apathetic dependent, infantile, purposeless being . . . A new American man.[2]

These two authors are apparently also ignorant of defection, information giving, breakdowns of discipline, predatory behavior, propaganda collaborations, and the like among POW's in previous wars.

The motivation and conduct of American servicemen, in or out of prison camps, have been a source of concern from the American Revolution to the present. George Washington had numerous unkind words for defectors; mutineers and those of his forces who lacked "public spirit."

The Civil War prisoner conduct was no better, thousands of Confederate soldiers defected to the Federal Army and vice versa. Does this quote sound familiar?

> Prison life to them was a disaster, appaling and overwhelming. . . . Some relapsed almost at once into helpless and hopeless apathy, caring for nothing, thinking of nothing except the homes and friends they had left. Huddled in corners they sat for hours gazing into vacancy. Nostalgia (homesickness) occasionally appears on the surgeons' reports as the cause of death of a prisoner, but there can be no question that it was a contributing cause in many cases attributed to other diseases.[3]

Korea? No, the American Civil War.

World War I recorded 170,000 draft dodgers and deserters. Even in the "popular" war, World War II, the Army worried about lack of dedication among its troops. Another quote that sounds like it came from the authors distorting Korea:

> There was only a handful of collaborators and informers. But there were many indeed who became so demoralized that they abandoned every tenet of personal integrity, honor, loyalty and the accepted standards of human behavior. These sank to the level of animals or worse. There was the selfish, dog-eat-dog, every-man-for-himself attitude among the prisoners and little group spirit. Discipline generally collapsed at the time of surrender. Many of the men would no longer obey the orders of their officers. Many of the officers, on the other hand, abandoned all responsibility and made no effort to control or take care of the men. Military organizations fell apart, and were further broken up by the /enemy/ in a well-calculated effort to destroy group cohesion and convert the prisoners into an easily dominated, amorphous mass.[4]

Korea? No, a description of USPW under the Japanese during World War II.

Prisoner Treatment

Another very distorted picture concerning prison treatment is presented to the American public by our courageous American authors.

Communist propagandists found good use for the commentaries by Major Mayer, Mr. Kinkead, his Army informants and other Americans who echo the same themes. When the UN General Assembly condemned the Communists for mistreating US prisoners of war, the Communist press quoted such sources to dispute the evidence offered by the US. An example of such was taken from parts of newspapers stories of Major Mayer's speeches: "No ill treatment of American prisoners of war by Korean and Chinese." American Army Doctor Mayer admits.[5]

New China Press Agency, 24th Washington Correspondence /August 24, 1956/:

> The American Army psychiatrist, Major Mayer, recently testified in The Ways and Means Committee of the House of Representatives. He said, "The Peoples Army of Korea and of Communist China did not treat the American prisoners of war cruelly at all. Quite the contrary, they treated them very well."[6]

Now let us examine some facts concerning the mistreatment, coercion and atrocities committed against US POW's by North Koreans and Red Chinese. Conclusive evidence was provided to the US Senate proving that American POW's who were not deliberately murdered at the time of capture or shortly after capture, were beaten, wounded, starved, and tortured; molested, displayed, and humiliated before the civilian populace. In addition, POW's were forced to march long distances to Communist prison camps without benefit of adequate food, water, shelter, clothing or medical care - once there to experience further acts of human indignities.

During the Korean War, 7,190 Americans were taken prisoner, 2,730 or 38 percent died in captivity.[7] Over 1,000 more were murdered or died as a result of mistreatment prior to reaching the prison camps. This is the worst death rate for American POW's in the history of war for the US.

Atrocities

The "Sunchon Tunnel Massacre" - on October 20, 1950, a group of American POW's were being transported north by train. After four and one-half days of travel, the train halted in a tunnel near Sunchon, and the prisoners were taken off in groups, on the pretext of being fed. They were machine-gunned; 138 known Americans dead in this one incident.[8]

On 17 August 1950 North Korean soldiers stripped 26 American soldiers of their possessions, tied their hands behind their backs and shot 22 of them to death at a place called "Hill 303."[9]

"Death Marches" were the first and most often the worst ordeal the prisoners had to suffer. The North Koreans frequently tied a prisoner's hands behind his back or bound his arms with wire. Many of the wounded received no medical attention until they reached the camp. Death marches in the winter of 1950-1951 were ordered when the trails were knee deep in snow and polar winds flogged the toiling column. On one of these marches 700 men were headed north. Before the camp was reached, 500 men had perished.[10]

In a death march from Seoul to Pyongyang, 80 Americans of a 376 man column perished or were shot.[11]

On December 21, 1951, 30 more American POW's were shot and bayoneted to death.[12] Once the marches were over and they reached the prison camps things did not improve much. In the worst of the camps, the prisoners existed by the skin of their teeth and raw courage. Men in the bad camps were known to lose 50 pounds in a matter of weeks. One camp called "the caves" was extremely bad. They were caverns where men were confined. Here they were forced to sleep without blankets. Then food was thrown at them. There

were no latrine facilities. In "the caves" the prisoners were subjected to a condition of misery and degradation almost unbelievable.

In winter opportunities for torture increased, POW's are known to have been marched barefooted onto the frozen Yalu River where water was poured over their feet. With temperatures well below 20 degrees, the water froze immediately, and prisoners were left for hours with their feet frozen into the ice to "reflect" on their crimes.[13]

We could go on and on listing atrocities committed against American POW's. However, it is apparent that once again certain individuals have distorted the facts about American POW's in Korea.

Actual Cases of Collaborations

Mr. Kinkead makes the assertions that one man in every seven, or more than 13% were guilty of "serious collaboration." However, the official records prove differently. Out of almost 4,000 Army repatriates 82 were considered for trial, only 47 of these were "approved for court-martial" by reviewing authority. Only 14 of the 47 were ever tried and of those tried only 11 were convicted. In addition, only ten were convicted of offenses involving collaboration with the enemy and that their offenses were in some instances judged by the court so slight or so mitigated by circumstances, as not to warrant severe punishment. So by "legal

criteria" only 10 of 4,000 American POW's have been proved guilty of "collaboration."

Actions Taken By US

First, in 27 July 1953 the Armistice with North Korea and Red China was signed. The US "wiped the slate clean" with a country, North Korea, that had atrociously murdered thousands of American POW's. A country that had violated every article of the Geneva Convention.

Second, the United States allowed certain Americans, without stern rebuttal, to grossly distort the facts concerning the mistreatment and conduct of American fighting men.

Third, the United States, because of the supposedly disgraceful conduct of American POW's in Korea, formulated the document called "The US Fighting Man's Code of Conduct." The inadequacies of this document will not be discussed in this report.

CHAPTER IV

THE VIETNAM WAR INJUSTICES

In 1964 the United States once again goes to war in Asia. However, for this war the US has a new "Code of Conduct" for the American fighting man. If an American soldier is taken prisoner by the enemy he can rest assured that his country will act with vigor and speed to obtain his release, and he can be certain that all of the resources of our Government will be brought to bear to achieve this end.[1]

In addition, Americans captured by the enemy should receive just and humane treatment because North Vietnam signed the 1949 Geneva Convention on 28 June 1957.

After six years of war let us evaluate how well the American POW's have faired. First, has his release been accomplished in a vigorous and rapid manner, and second, has he received humane treatment as outlined in the 1949 Geneva Convention?

As of 1 January 1970, 1,355 American servicemen could be in enemy hands. With varying degrees of certainty 422 are known to be captured. The remaining 933 are listed as missing in action.[2] The reason for the uncertainty as to how many Americans are actually in prison is because North Vietnam refuses to provide the United

States with an accurate list of captured personnel. Of the total in both categories (MIA/POW), well over half are pilots and aircrews downed in the air war over North Vietnam during 1965-68. Some of these prisoners have been in captivity over five years. The following shows "Air Force" personnel only.

Year Shot Down	Number	Years MIA/POW[3]
1964	1	6 Years in Dec 1970
1965	81	5 Years +
1966	205	4 Years +
1967	240	3 Years +
1968	151	2 Years +
1969	97	1 Year
1970 (As of June)	48	-

Has the United States brought all of its resources to bear against North Vietnam to obtain the release of American POW's? To this date the US has not used any economic or military pressure to expedite the release of our POW's.

Treatment of American POW's

The North Vietnamese have shown total disregard for the 1949 Geneva Convention. As a result US prisoners have suffered savage and inhumane treatment.

On 24 June 1965 North Vietnam openly announced the execution of a US soldier. As a result, on 10 August 1965, Secretary of State Dean Rusk wrote to the International Committee of the Red Cross stating that the US would abide by all provisions of the Geneva

Convention and that the US would expect the other parties of the conflict to do likewise.[4] This type of retaliation by the United States had little effect on the North Vietnamese, for on 26 September 1965 (one month later) the North Vietnamese announced that they had executed two more US prisoners.[5] The United States immediately made another strong protest to the International Red Cross.

Hanoi has claimed that American POW's are being treated "humanely" under a "lenient policy." However, Navy Lieutenant Robert F. Frishman, one of the last men to be released from North Vietnam publicly exploded these claims of good treatment. He said:

> I don't think solitary confinement, forced statements, living in a cage for three years, being put in straps, not being allowed to sleep or eat, removal of fingernails, being hung from the ceiling, having an infected arm which was almost lost, not receiving medical care, being dragged along with a broken leg, or not allowing the exchange of mail to prisoners of war are humane.[6]

The testimony of Army Major James N. Rowe and others who escaped from Viet Cong camps shows that American POW's were starved, tortured and executed.[7]

Lt Colonel Norris M. Overly, Jr., shot down over North Vietnam in September 1967 and later released by the North Vietnamese relates some of his experiences while held captive. Colonel Overly states:

> I was placed in one of these cells on my stomach with my feet in wooden stocks, such as were used in Salem, Mass. My arms were tied behind me with wet ropes, and

I stayed in that position for the next twenty-nine days, except for two periods each day when I was allowed to relieve myself and was fed a small bowl of rice.

My normal weight is 170 pounds, and I estimate that, when I came out of there twenty-nine days later I was down to about 115 pounds.

In conclusion, I think we can safely say that the North Vietnamese will go down in history as the most inhumane and cruel enemy we have ever fought because of the sheer number of years they are making so many of our men suffer - END[8]

What is most discouraging is that there appears to be no relief in sight for Americans being held captive in North Vietnam.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The plight of the American POW has been and still is a gruesome story. The United States has failed to achieve humane treatment for American prisoners of war. The Geneva Convention has been totally disregarded by North Korea and North Vietnam.

In addition, the United States has not fulfilled its obligations to American POW's in the Vietnam War as stated in the Code of Conduct. This country has not acted with vigor and speed using all resources available to obtain the release of US prisoners of war.

The United States will not achieve its goals, and life for the American POW will not improve until the US proves to the world that we will not tolerate the murdering, torturing, and enslaving of Americans.

NOTES ON CHAPTER I

1. Air Force Pamphlet 34-10-1, The US Fighting Man's Code, 1955, p. 10.

2. The Provost Marshal General Study, Prisoners of War, Volume I, p. 111-21. Hereafter cited as The Provost Marshal.

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1. The Provost Marshal, p. 111-24.

2. Ibid., p. 111-25.

3. Ibid., p. 111-25.

4. Major Ralph O. Clemens, Jr., The Relevance of the Code of Conduct, Air University, Maxwell AFB, May 1970, p. 10.

5. Ibid., p. 10.

6. The Provost Marshal, p. 111-30.

7. Ibid., p. 111-31.

8. Ibid., p. 111-32.

9. Ibid., p. 111-33.

10. Ibid., p. 111-34.

NOTES ON CHAPTER III

1. Albert D. Biderman, March to Calumny, 1963, p. 16.

2. H. H. Wubber, "American Prisoners of War in Korea," American Quarterly 22:3-19, Spring 1970, p. 16.

3. The Provost Marshal, p. 111-47.

4. Ibid.

5. Biderman, op. cit., p. 122.

6. Ibid., p. 123.

7. Ibid., p. 91.

8. Ibid., p. 118.

9. The Provost Marshal,

10. POW - The Fight Continues After the Battle. Report of the Secretary of Defense's Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War, August 1955, p. 8.

11. Biderman, op. cit., p. 118.

12. Ibid., p. 119.

13. Ibid., p. 132.

14. Ibid., p. 28.

15. Ibid., p. 37.

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2. Eric C. Ludvigsen, "Missing, Dead or Captured," Army 20:24-32, February 1970.

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8. Lt Colonel Norris M. Overly, USAF, "Held Captive in Hanoi - An Ex-POW Tells How It Was," Air Force and Space Digest, November 1970, p. 86.

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