

EX-POW BULLETIN

the official voice of the
American Ex-Prisoners of War

501(c)3 Veterans Service Organization

Volume 81

www.axpow.org

Number 7/8/9

July~August~September 2024

Gold
Transparency
2024

Candid.



We exist to help those who cannot help themselves



*POW-MIA Recognition Day
September 20, 2024*

Remember Those Who Made The Ultimate Sacrifice
(82nd Anniversary of Bataan Death March)

Bataan Legacy Historical Society

www.bataanlegacy.org



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Independence is declared; it must be maintained.

–Sam Houston, American politician (1793–1863)

The Declaration of Independence is America's revolutionary Charter of Freedom and the document upon which the nation's founding principles were established.

Fly your flag proudly!

From the day when North Koreans attacked South Korea on June 25, 1950 to the day of the armistice on July 27, 1953, the events of the Korean war revealed the mass destruction, pain, and suffering Koreans had to endure. At the end of the war, more than 3 million Koreans died while millions of refugees remained homeless and distraught. About 1 million Chinese died in this battle and American casualties numbered 54,246 people. Operation Big Switch began on August 5, 1953. It was the final exchange of prisoners of war by both sides. By December, 1953 the figures for repatriated POWs stood at 77,000 Communists for 12,700 UN men, of whom 3,597 were Americans.

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Deadline for the Oct-Dec 2024
Bulletin is Aug 30.. Please send
all materials to the editor at the
above address.

COVER: National POW/MIA Recognition Day. Observances of National POW/MIA Recognition Day are held across the country on military installations, ships at sea, state capitols, schools and veterans' facilities. It is traditionally observed on the third Friday in September each year. A Pentagon ceremony for National POW/MIA Recognition Day will be held Friday, Sept. 17, 2021. This ceremony will feature troops from each of the military services.

INSIDE COVER: the 82nd anniversary commemoration of the Ball of Bataan.

EVENTS:

106TH Infantry Division Association 77TH Annual Reunion
Sept. 18-22, 2024, Atrium Hotel & Suites, Irving, TX
For more information, visit www.106thInfDivAssn.org

EX-POW Bulletin (ISSN 0161-7451) is published quarterly (four times annually) by the American Ex-Prisoners of War, PO Box 3445, Arlington, TX 76007-3445. Periodical postage paid at Arlington, TX and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send address changes to EX-POW Bulletin, AXPOW Headquarters, PO Box 3445, Arlington, TX 76007-3445. Founded April 14, 1942, in Albuquerque, NM, then known as Bataan Relief Organization, Washington State non-profit corporation, "American Ex-Prisoners of War", October 11, 1949, recorded as Document No. 133762, Roll 1, Page 386-392. NONPROFIT CORPORATION. Nationally Chartered August 10, 1982. Appearance in this publication does not constitute endorsement by the American Ex-Prisoners of War of the product or service advertised. The publisher reserves the right to decline or discontinue any such advertisement.



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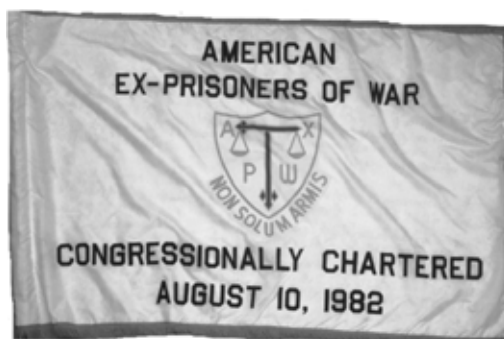
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Folding Our Flag



Our noble organization has served the former prisoner of war population of the United States since 1942 and was chartered by Congress in 1982. In the 82 years of our existence, we have aided thousands of ex-POWs and their spouses, lobbied Congress to approve and fund earned benefits of our service. Until three years ago we had Service Officers in VA Centers and Hospitals across the country to assist our members as they filed claims for medical benefits. But as Charles Anthony wrote in the last issue of the Bulletin, the time has come for us to shift our focus.

World War II, the largest source of prisoners of war, ended nearly 80 years ago and those held as prisoners in both the European and Pacific theaters are now in their late 90s/early 100s – if they are still alive. The Korean War ended more than 70 years ago, so its surviving ex-POWs are in their late 80s or 90s. The POWs from Vietnam War returned home over 50 years ago, and at 77, I am one of the youngest...most are in their 80s. Only 22 Americans were captured in the Gulf War and they are mostly in their 70s. Few of the Vietnam or Gulf War POWs joined the American Ex-POW organization. Clearly, there are very few members left and all of us are nearing the end of our earthly sojourn.

Next April, we will fold our flag and turn our assets over to the Friends of Andersonville to fund the "American Ex-Prisoners of War National POW Museum Foundation." That will make sure all our assets go into creating for the museum that will keep the memory of our service to this nation alive for generations to come.

Commander Robert Certain

from the CEO



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Hope this bulletin finds you and your family safe and healthy.

Every day I and so many other Americans think about how the world is an ever increasingly dangerous place, both home and abroad. Our law enforcement agencies and military have their challenges in protecting us all and we are so indebted to them.

We have reported in the bulletin several times that we are approaching our last year of the AXPOW organization as we know it, an active veteran's service organization. As we transition the AXPOW, we are writing history. This is an opportunity to reflect on its heritage. The organization was started on April 14, 1942 as the Bataan Relief Organization (BRO), its name was changed to American Ex-Prisoners of War at its second National Con-

vention in April 1949. The reason for the name change was so veterans from the European Theater would better realize that they were eligible for membership. By changing the name to American Ex-Prisoners of War, it would welcome all former POWs, Civilian Internees and their families and descendants from any war. There were 800 at the 1949 convention. During the earlier years, membership grew and our involvement as advocates for veterans grew as well. However, change was on the horizon and over the more recent decades, membership and volunteers have declined, we have proportionally eliminated activity that could not be supported with human and monetary resources leading us to where we are today.

As we plan our next phase with a heavy heart, closing of all active services. We are continuing to focus on our legacy to honor the past and present American EX-POWs. While the centerpiece of that legacy exists at Andersonville Georgia with the Prisoner of War Museum at the national level, there are countless other components of the POW legacy. They exist in our nation's capital in many forms including a plaque at Arlington National Cemetery and at the Whitehouse visitors center in the form a commemorative POW/MIA chair.

There are countless examples of the EXPOW legacy throughout the country both big and small in many forms both in days of recognition, monu-

ments, flags, plaques, parades, etc. We are open to consider other ideas that are practical and achievable in this coming year and local projects may and should continue to honor our EX-POWs.

One such example we were scoping is an initiative is to enhance the entranceway of the Andersonville Museum. Specifically, we were trying to obtain a World War II French gratitude 40x8 railcars, named for their capacity to transport 40 men or 8 horses. As may you recall, in France their boxcars played a pivotal role in both world wars. In World War II, Germany used these cars to transport troops and supplies to the front lines and transported prisoners east back to Germany. In gratitude for their liberation in 1949, 49 such railcars filled with gifts, referred to as the merci train, were sent by the French government, one for each of the 48 continental states and one for Hawaii/Washington DC. We made calls throughout the country in an effort to locate one that is not being actively displayed for public consumption. With this extensive search, there is good news and bad news. On the disappointing side, we could not locate any cars that still existed that were not in appropriate use so that initiative has reached a road block. On the positive side, it was very rewarding to learn of the stories how they were rebuilt and the pride and honor of the current keepers of these historic railcars.

I am reaching out to our members to ask for ideas. The entrance to Andersonville

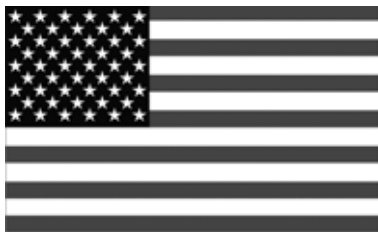
ceo, cont'd...

National Historic Site is lovely, but unfortunately, visitors have to traverse the park to find reference to the National POW Museum. All ideas will be welcomed.

Moving to the legislative activities in Washington, there are four veterans' bills that have passed House of Representatives awaiting action by the Senate. -- H.R. 5914, Veterans Education Transparency and Training Act; H.R. 3738, Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration Act; H.R. 1767, Student Veteran Benefit Restoration Act; and H.R. 4016, Veteran Fraud Reimbursement Act.

An ongoing integral part of the AXPOW legislative agenda has been to eliminate the veteran homelessness problem. There are several related bills introduced to Congress in the earliest stages which have not left their respective committees, namely: H.R. 645, HR 3676, HR 2525, HR 523, HR 3848 and S 290. It is negligent for Congress to ignore this desperate situation for those that have served our country.

Happy Independence Day!



Andersonville



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160th Civil War Anniversary ~ Preserving History

As we mark the significant milestone of the 160th anniversary of Andersonville National Historic Site and Andersonville National Cemetery, we ask that visitors reflect on the stories of those who reflect on the stories of those who suffered here as prisoners of war. We honor the rich history encapsulated within these grounds.

Andersonville stands as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit amid adversity. We look to acknowledge and educate about the lives of those who endured this place. This Historic Site has been a custodian of memories, and a silent witness to the trials and tribulations of the past. It serves as a somber reminder of the sacrifices made and the strength of human will.

As we honor this milestone, let us continue to preserve and protect the legacy woven into the very soil beneath our feet.

We hope you join us this year in acknowledging the solemnity of this occasion, as we stand together in remembrance and appreciation of the historical significance encapsulated within Andersonville National Historic Site.

Annual Events

Each year the park hosts a series of recurring events at the National Prisoner of War Museum, the historic prison site, or the Andersonville National Cemetery.

April: Avenue of Flags, National Former POW Recognition Day

May: Memorial Day, Avenue of Flags

July: Avenue of Flags

September: Avenue of Flags, National POW/MIA Recognition Day

November: Avenue of Flags, Living History Weekend

December: Avenue of Flags, Wreaths Across America

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America 250

A word that we're all likely to be hearing in the next few years is Semiquincentennial. It is the hard to pronounce label for the 250th anniversary of the American Revolutionary War. In fact, we are already deep into it. This June is the 250th anniversary of the Quartering Act, which was a part of the Intolerable Acts that were pivotal to our earliest founder's decision to break with the King and Great Britain. Next April 19th (2025) will be the 250th anniversary of the first battle of the revolution at Lexington and Concord. This national commemoration will run through 2033.

To mark this series of events, many agencies and organizations are deep into planning celebrations and initiatives to enhance public education on our revolutionary heritage. Organizations like the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) and other similar groups have begun programs especially aimed to enhance flag education, Liberty tree plantings, genealogy programs and other initiatives to build a public appreciation for the men and women who sacrificed their lives and fortunes for our fledgling nation.

For those of us who have a strong interest in POWs in history, this is fertile ground to tell a story that's been nearly forgotten. Until approximately 2000, the generally accepted number of POWs (American Patriots) held during the Revolution was 18,200 of which 7,280 died or a death rate of 40% which exceeds the death rate of our POWs held by the Japanese or the North Koreans. Recent scholarship by five different historians has offered us revised numbers of 30,000 POWs held and 18,000 deaths or a death rate of 60%. How can these numbers be so different? The biggest explanation is that record keeping was sketchy at best. By comparison, in the Civil War, both Union and Confederate forces kept much better records of those held and of those who died in captivity.



HMS Jersey was a 4th Rate Frigate launched in 1736 that was converted to a prison ship or hulk in 1778. It was the most notorious of the prison ships, mainly because it was the largest and held the most POWs in terrible circumstances.

Being captured by the British was a terrible sentence. The largest numbers of captives took place because of major losses by the Continental Army. As an example, the surrender of Charleston in 1780 resulted in 5,466 patriots captured by the British. The disastrous defeats in

and around New York City in 1776 nearly decimated the Army and most POWs ended up in various jails and prisons. Most notorious were the 26 prison ships in Wallabout Bay on the Brooklyn side of the East River. These ships had ended their useful life and were converted into grounded prisons that were nothing more than death traps for those held.

In the 1770s, sanitation, nutritional standards and the care of humans in close confinement was not well understood. But another factor that contributed to the critical situation was status. From the beginning of the Revolution, the British saw our rebellion as an insurrection and those captured as mere criminals. This was nothing new to the Brits. They had experienced many such rebellions in their colonies. And they knew how to deal with it through brutality. If a prisoner died in captivity, that was one less rebel and perhaps an example to others not to be disloyal to the crown. On four occasions, leaders of the patriot cause proposed exchange agreements. The British rejected them all because they would have to recognize the United States as a sovereign nation which was not acceptable. After the victory at Saratoga in October 1777 and the recognition of the American cause by the French the British had a quandary. A country (albeit not a friend of the Brits) recognized us as a nation, but also we had captured over 6,000 British troops at Saratoga who were now our POWs.

Many have asked if the brutality of the British captors was intentional in killing as many

friends, cont'd...

American POWs as possible. There is strong historical evidence to support that assertion. However, there's also evidence that supports that it was not intentional but rather just bad management, misguided priorities and a lack of consistent policy. But evidence of some terrible acts by specific commanders is held up as examples of brutality. As an example, Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton refused to accept the surrender of patriots at the Waxhaw's in 1780 and approximately 100 Americans were killed trying to surrender.

Interestingly enough, our nation held POWs too. Those we held were treated better but not by much. Our nation had hardly enough resources to feed our own army, not that that's a legitimate excuse. Most of the captives we held were kept in small towns in western Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. As the war dragged on for eight years, the press back in England led public sentiment to bring the captive's home. The King's subjects were getting tired of the long war.

On a personal note, I have a direct ancestor named Lewis Anderson who served in the New Jersey Militia. He was captured by the British at Kings Bridge, New York and was held for nearly a year. He was fortunate to escape while serving on a work detail hauling supplies for his captors. During his captivity he contracted smallpox and lost an eye. He died at the age of 81 while living with his son in Ohio. These kinds of stories illustrate that the sacrifices made by our forefathers were profound.

There are exhibits and displays in the National Prisoner of War Museum about the Revolution. I wish there was more, but that is mainly due to the lack of information and original objects associated with the story.

As the next ten years unfold, we should all remember our early beginnings. This is a national opportunity to engage the citizenry in a history lesson. This is especially important for our youth. We should all support the efforts of groups like the DAR and SAR to reach out to scouts, students and teachers to assist. Many resources exist to help with this effort. We don't need to start from scratch. And too, if you have not done so, try to find if you have an ancestor who supported the cause. But I must warn you, it's addictive. But in a good way. And

above all, we should never forget the patriots that sacrificed the most for our freedom – the POWs.



The Martyrs Monument at Fort Greene Park in Brooklyn was dedicated in 1908 as a lasting memorial to the POWs who died in the American Revolution. In its base are the bones of many of those men who died on the prison ships and were buried in shallow graves near Wallabout Bay.

Sources:

Forgotten Patriots, . The Untold Story of American Prisoners During the Revolutionary War By Edwin G. Burrows, 2008

Captives of Liberty, Prisoners of War and the Politics of Vengeance in the American Revolution. By T. Cole Jones, 2020

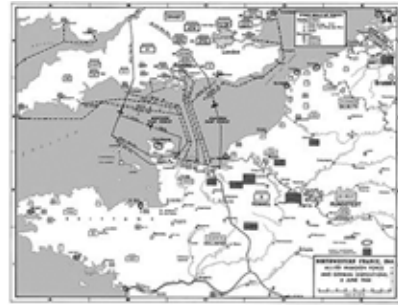
Dangerous Guests, Enemy Captives and Revolutionary Communities During the War for Independence. By Ken Miller, 2014

Relieve Us of This Burthen, American Prisoners of War in the Revolutionary South, 1780-1782. By Carl P. Borick, 2012

Rebels at Sea, Privateering in the American Revolution, By Eric Jay Dolin, 2022

Veterans (and Friends) Storm France

Once More to Remember D-Day



Eighty years have passed now since the Allied invasion of Normandy. June 6, 1944 was the day, long planned and long awaited, that the D-Day landings began along the French coast during World War II. It was to be the invasion that would ultimately lead to the liberation of Europe.

The average age of the soldiers and sailors who participated in that now-historic attack hovers around 100. But still they come each year, and gathered again to commemorate the event that brought together the land, air, and sea forces of the allied armies in the largest amphibious operation in military history. and the part they played in it.

The operation, given the codename OVERLORD, delivered five naval assault divisions to the beaches of Normandy, France. The beaches were given the code names "Utah," "Omaha," "Gold," "Juno, and "Sword."

The invasion force included 7,000 ships and landing craft manned by over 195,000 naval personnel from eight allied countries. Almost 133,000 troops from the United States, the British Commonwealth, and their allies, landed on D-Day.



Barry Eigel via Wikimedia Commons with permission.

Troops from Australia, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Greece, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Poland also participated in D-Day and the Battle of Normandy. Total Allied casualties from all these countries during the landing exceeded 10,300.

By June 30, over 850,000 men, 148,000 vehicles, and 570,000 tons of supplies had landed on the Normandy shores. American forces suffered over 4,000 casualties on Omaha Beach alone, the bloodiest of five landing sites on the Normandy coast on June 6th, 1944.

D-Day Loss Totals

	D-Day Casualties	WWII Deaths
Germany	6,000	3,500,000
United States	2,501	292,131
United Kingdom	1,449	264,443
Canada	391	37,476

The program for the week of events across a 50-mile stretch of beaches runs more than 30 pages — with concerts, parades, parachute drops, convoys and ceremonies. President Emmanuel Macron of France presided over eight commemorations in three days. Two dozen heads of state were expected, including the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky.

On June 3, Parachutists jumped from World War II-era planes into now peaceful Normandy to kick off a week of ceremonies marking the 80th anniversary of D-Day

The Anniversary celebration's centerpiece was a ceremony June 6 attended by President Joe Biden, his French counterpart, Emmanuel Macron, Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Britain's Prince William and other world leaders. President Biden will give a speech about defending freedom and democracy.

The Normandy American Cemetery, sited on a bluff high above the north coast of France, is one of the world's best-known military memorials. The World War II cemetery there contains the graves of nearly 9,400 war dead, with nearly 1,600 names on its Walls of the Missing, names of men most of whom lost their lives in the D-Day landings and ensuing operations. Its hallowed grounds preserve the remains of nearly 9,400 Americans who died during the Allied liberation of France.

Three Medal of Honor recipients rest here. Forty-five sets of brothers lie side by side.

The visitor center describes the events and significance of the D-Day landings and the ensuing campaign for Normandy. Every year over a million visitors come to pay their respects to the fallen and learn more about the crucial events that happened here.

Within the picturesque trees, an immense array of headstones rises in long regular rows. At the west end of the cemetery, granite statues represent the United States and France. A small chapel sits at the center of the cemetery.

Inside, a ceiling mosaic depicts America blessing her sons as they depart to fight for freedom. In the open arc of the memorial, a bronze statue symbolizes the indomitable spirit of American youth.

Over 1,500 names are carved on the walls in the Garden of the Missing behind the memorial. The daunting challenges and intense combat of the campaigns to liberate France live on in this inspiring burial ground – the final resting place for so many courageous American servicemen and women.

John Skelly, Webmaster
www.axpow.org

namPOW news

The Stress of Separation Alice Stratton

[US Naval Institute Proceedings
July 1978]

A Navy family accepts long family separations as part of the normal way of life. But when that separation is long and indefinite, because the man has become a prisoner of war, things are no longer normal. In fact, many of the feelings experienced on both sides of the gulf of apartness are more akin to death than life. How, then, do the prisoner and his family cope with an experience for which no conscious preparation is adequate?

The dramatic return of U.S. prisoners of war in 1973 after so many years of separation was given worldwide publicity. The fact of the overwhelming welcome back accorded these men testifies to how deeply touched Americans were by the unfortunate circumstances of the POWs and their families. The separation and loss these people suffered were indeed dramatic and newsworthy. In this article I will describe, from a personal viewpoint, the stages both the men and their family members went through in adjusting to their trauma.

The stages are those postulated by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.¹ The descriptions of the POWs come from my husband, who was held captive in North Vietnam for six years and two months and was in contact with approximately 330 men undergoing similar experiences. Information is

also included from ten books written by returned POWs.² In 1971, the average age of these men was 39, average educational level was three years of college, and the majority were commissioned officers and aviators.³

Included also are the reactions of approximately 25 POW/MIA (missing in action) wives or family members whom I knew. The average age of these women (in 1971) was 34. The average educational level was three years of college. If the sample had been averaged earlier in the war, the educational level would have been lower, because approximately one-third of the women increased their educational level during the years the men were missing.

Denial—POWs:

Aviators live constantly with the dangers inherent in flying, and in combat the hazards are even more obvious. However well prepared they may be, when catastrophe occurs, a common first reaction is, "This just can't be happening to me." In the initial hours after being shot down and captured, men experienced the unreal quality of "It can't be true," dispersed with the "Aw, Hell" reaction when the awareness of what they were up against became a stark reality. Some had the feeling, "Maybe it's all a dream; I'll wake up and be back on the ship."⁴

The grim existence of prison life was so overwhelming for some that they actually retreated into a dream world most of the time to shut out the painful environment and deny its inevitability. For these men, their daydreams, night dreams, and fantasies became their reality, and they spent more time in their own world than in the real world of prison life. Many men felt that the longer they could sleep, the better: "If one could sleep 12

hours a day, that cut the prison time in half."

Some men talked constantly about peace being right around the corner as a way of denying their situation. Even though most of the men had been briefed before their capture on the fact that this was going to be a protracted war—10-20 years—they became angry at their fellow prisoners when reminded of this.

On the surface there was sometimes a similarity between denial and acceptance, and certain behavior was misconstrued as acceptance. The most obvious example of this was the men who had simply counted themselves out of the circumstances around them by stating (verbally or behaviorally), "I'm not going to worry. This too will pass and be over soon. In the meantime, I have no commitment, no responsibilities. I'll just sit and wait." While on the surface this seemed to be acceptance of the situation, for some it was resignation or a denial of the need to become involved with one's fellows.

For the majority of the men, the stage of denial on an unconscious level was passed through quickly. At a later stage, or while in solitary confinement, a man might consciously choose to daydream more than usual, but this was more of a conscious adaptive defense than the first stage of denial.

Denial—Family:

For the family members it was harder to get out of the stage of denial. During the first hours, weeks, or even months, some family members expressed the hope that their men would walk out of the jungle any day and be safe again. Unfortunately, in the early years of the war, before any lists came out, there often were simply too few facts to know whether the man was dead or alive. The few

stress, cont'd...

"exceptions" (occasional escapes from the South, etc.) kept hope alive and denial working. Sometimes, even when told bluntly by other squadron members or wingmen after returning home that they did not believe their fellow officer alive, a wife would become angry and continue to deny the facts.

One wife almost never read the newspaper after her husband was reported missing. She had made up her mind that he was alive and did not want to be bothered by facts. "I'll read when he comes home," she said, and a large pile of unopened newspapers bore witness to this intention. This may have made some sense, for, while the rest of us were frantic with the constant rumors of the possible releases, peace talks, etc., she remained tranquil.

Fortune-tellers or psychics were used by some to get answers and subsequently to remain in the denial stage. Wives reported experiences of feeling their husbands' presence in the room when they awakened from a sleep. Others dreamed the men were alive. A psychic told one wife that he could see the missing husband walking in a garden. According to the psychic, the man was not on the list released by North Vietnamese because they wanted to keep him. He was supposedly being held in a camp where he was working as a medic.

Cohn Parkes⁵ describes a stage called "searching" which I would equate to Kubler-Ross's denial. In my case, I remember an incident that occurred several years after my husband's capture, when I thought I was well past the early stages of adjustment. I saw a man putting on his hat across the parking lot of the commissary store. That one characteristic gesture brought back all the intense longing and hurt with a painful rush of emotion, and I found myself running for a few seconds to get a better look. When the man turned and faced me, all the tears of disappointment and sadness flowed again, as though I had only then heard the dreadful news of my husband's capture.

Each of the wives had the dubious pleasure of having her husband's "effects" sent to her. Going through these "cruise boxes" and deciding what to do with his personal effects, was handled in widely variant ways and again seemed to describe how the event and emotions were denied. Some

wives, like myself, put all their husbands' things in the closets or dresser drawers, as if their husbands had only just left after breakfast and might walk through the door at any moment. I did this purposely because it brought me some comfort. On the other hand, one wife of a man declared missing in action seemed to adjust quickly. Almost within weeks, she had disposed of all of her husband's clothing and personal belongings. She appeared to have worked through the trauma and early decided her husband was dead rather than missing, even though his status was not listed that way at the time by the Department of Defense. However, just before the final list of returning POWs came out, she seemed to revert back to the beginning stages again (as did a number of wives).

Anger—POW:

After the numbness, shock, and denial wore away, a common reaction was "Why me? Why didn't some of the 'SOBs' get it? After that, men's anger would project itself onto any convenient person—President Johnson, Secretary McNamara, the wing commander, the skipper, the SOBs, or the stupid flight leader. There was also anger at themselves, which appeared as guilt. "If only I had paid more attention to the intelligence briefing or followed the standard operating procedures."

There were some men who never progressed past the anger stage. For these men, coping or surviving could be handled best by remaining angry. They resisted the enemy by acting as a "tough guy" or "bad guy." The stories of these brave men and their courage are legion, but it should be noted that there were times when the anger of these men may have unintentionally been at the expense of others. Improvements in prison life may have been denied by prison administrators solely because these few men would not take any of the enemy's "goodies."

Anger—Family:

Although I honestly don't remember these words, my husband swears that at our parting, as I leaned over to give him that final kiss, I didn't whisper a sweet nothing into his ear, but said rather tersely, "Don't you dare die and leave me with these three little kids." He says these are the words that came back to him in those seconds as he was contemplating whether or not to pull the curtain and eject from his airplane after it was hit. Knowing quite well what was down below, he chose incarceration in a North Vietnam prison.

stress, cont'd...

camp to his wife's anger for eternity!

As with the men, the "why me?" question was one frequently heard in the beginning. Wives would go over and over the circumstances, trying to make some sense of them in their lives. "God must have a reason for putting my husband there. He's there to serve a greater good." And, as with the men, there was the question, "Why didn't so-and-so get it instead of my husband?" Through the years, and especially at moments of immense frustration, there was great bitterness expressed against the president, congress, and the services. It was felt that others not in the same situation couldn't understand. Couples who once were friends were resented sometimes simply "because they had each other." There was occasionally open resentment between wife and mother-in-law or sister-in-law: "As long as they have a husband around, how can they possibly understand?" In addition, there was anger at the husband for "deserting" her. In some cases, this anger gave license for turning to other men, to bars, or to the bank account. "If only he hadn't left, I wouldn't be doing this." The anger for a few wives led them into a firm adoption of the women's liberation movement, especially if they began to realize over the years that they had been kept dependent by their husbands. In the particular group of wives I knew, there was not so much guilt evident in this stage as there was for the men. This is not to say it was not there, but it did not surface as one of the things discussed. Bitter outward anger was more evident in this stage for the women.

Bargaining—POW

Pledges (to oneself or to God) to reform one's personal, professional, and married life in exchange for or upon release were fairly common on the part of the POWs while in prison. The decision to be more religious is testified to by the religious experiences which are highlighted in the books written by the men after their release.⁶ The men talked of adopting a North Vietnamese orphan, working in the Peace Corps, going into teaching, running for political office, and righting all wrongs committed in the past. It should be stressed that although these promises or pledges were often made by some as a bargain (with God) for release, they also represented for others a genuine desire for change, which in some cases has been implemented.

Bargaining—Family:

There was less discussion about bargaining among the wives than among the men. However, it is felt that bargaining still went on, but it was often kept private. Wives did make pledges to be better wives, better people. In my case, I tried the rosary novenas. A friend went to Mass every morning for five years and finally gave up. As acceptance came nearer, the wives could joke about the bargains: "I'll never complain about his going to happy hour again. I'll give up eating onions forever." This seeming lightness about our situation was hard to understand for the wives whose husbands had just been captured. It was a little like coming in late to a drinking party.

Depression—POW:

This is the most dangerous stage clinically, and it was felt to be fatal for a few POWs and nearly fatal for others. When one man became withdrawn and would not eat, his fellow prisoners successfully

brought him back to the anger stage by goading him. The anger was often turned toward his fellow POWs, which made things difficult, to say the least, in those confined quarters. However, the men felt that they were dealing with a lifesaving situation and were willing to take the consequences of their intrusions. Another man went into such a total withdrawal that he would assume a fetal position for days, surfacing only to relieve himself. In this case, all attempts to help him come out of his withdrawal state were unsuccessful, and the men learned that if they left him alone he would finally "surface".

Depression resulting from being broken in a torture session was common, but most of the men were able to gain enough support from one another to come out of this type of depression. One man was not able to do so, however. His depression progressed to the point where he would no longer accept the legal amenities of the prison such as food, clothing, etc. Although the others tried to convince him that such acceptance was in no way collaboration with the enemy, he continued to throw his food in his latrine bucket and stuff his clothing through a hole into the sewer ditch. The North Vietnamese kept him in solitary, considering his actions to be those of a madman, and he was later isolated from any contact with his fellow prisoners. Later, after he was listed by the North Vietnamese as having died of natural causes, it was felt that the man had lost the will to live: "The prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed."⁷

Although the preceding is an extreme and tragic example, depression to a lesser degree was apparent in most men at certain times. Troubled men might retreat from prison life for a while by

stress, cont'd...

thinking about a happy point in life, submerging themselves in it and remembering the good old days (which sometimes were not really that good!) and ruminating about how they could not return to them.

Depression—Family

Some wives handled their depression by “dropping out,” permanently or briefly, from the activities with other wives. Hopelessness and helplessness were expressed. “What’s the use? ‘I know I can’t manage without him. I feel so *alone*.” They often felt a sense of aimlessness, along with nervous tension and jumpiness. This was the stage when sleep disturbances were most common. There were some who increased alcohol consumption at this time and hung out in bars; some bed-hopped. Although both drinking and sex were also seen at the anger stage, they now had different meaning and often served to add to the depression. There would be large phone bills during this stage. The calls to others in the same situation were often late at night or into the wee hours of the morning

I called my first year “the weepy”. After that, most of the tears dried up. However, depression was always there, buried, perhaps, but there until the final resolution, and then it could be dealt with in terms of reality (he is or isn’t coming back). Another concern for me was the possibility that my husband might have changed or been changed. “Maybe he’ll come back a vegetable.”⁹ Actual depression was a stage which one might move in or out of at any given moment, but it was most prevalent among those who had most recently learned of their husbands’ casualties.

Acceptance—POW:

“In the concentration camp every circumstance conspires to make the prisoner lose his hold. All the familiar goals in life are snatched away. What alone remains is ‘the last of human freedoms—the ability to choose one’s attitude in a given set of circumstances.’ The prayer of St. Francis seems to best describe the attitude the men chose. “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

It should be stressed again that the resigned, the defeatists sometimes appeared to be in this stage. Also, there were a few collaborators.¹¹ However, these men were extremists. They had accepted their prison

life and their captors at the expense of their fellow prisoners.

How was acceptance seen in the prison camps? The men decided that their short-term goal was to survive and their long-term goal to return with honor. They learned to deal with and accept the art of the possible. The men had learned the lesson of the Benedictine monks or the precepts of Alcoholics Anonymous, and they were living each small time segment as it came. They learned to turn each small task or event into a meaningful event. Eating, exercising, and sweeping were ends in themselves to make up a day—and a life. The men geared themselves down to the slow pace of prison life, so that hours could be spent on the few tasks or events allowed. Time was spent rating meals—for taste, for appeal, for nourishment, and each of these was on a scale of 1-10.

Gradually, they learned to adapt constructively to their prison society. This became “optimized” when all the prisoners were finally brought together in December 1970 after the Son Tay Raid.¹² Resistance was coordinated within an Air Force wing organization, academic courses were organized, physical fitness was insisted upon, recreation was planned, and religious services were instituted—all without any assistance and despite much hindrance from the North Vietnamese. In other words, the men were learning to function in their restricted society. They learned to “pray as though it all depended on God, and work as though it all depended on them.” The resourcefulness with which these men dealt with their environment is another whole story in itself.¹³ At this point, the men were describing themselves as being freer than their captors, who had few choices. “At least we knew we were eventually going to go home. The guards would have to live under Communism, the greatest of all freedom inhibitors, for the rest of their lives.”

Acceptance—Family:

For each of us, acceptance came differently. I remember first being aware of it driving home one day several years before my husband’s release. All of a sudden, I realized with a start that I was actually happy. It was not the kind of happiness I was to know later, but there is definitely happiness in coping. I remember looking around almost guiltily, hoping no one had heard *those* thoughts ... how disloyal of me, with my husband rotting away in some prison camp¹⁴

The family’s acceptance showed itself in ways similar to the men’s. We learned to cope with each day (or moment) at a time, became involved with helping each other and in our community, worked out of our home,

stress, cont'd...

and in general got out of our self-imposed ghetto of unhappiness. We were gaining a new identity and learning a new set of roles as family administrators, planners, and disciplinarians, and each new step brought a greater sense of control of our destiny. With acceptance our sense of humor returned (as it did with the men), and we could laugh at and with ourselves.

Many of us found that working to help publicize the plight of our husbands helped us get over our feelings of helplessness, which consequently led to our greater sense of acceptance. At least we could now do something besides sit back and watch from the sidelines. Those of us who had progressed to some degree of acceptance knew that we now had to do all in our power to control our own destinies.

Summary:

The normal, necessary aspect of the grief/loss cycle needs to be stressed. Although there is a definite progression to the stages, they certainly were not always so clear-cut as they have been described in this article. Some individuals remained in one stage, some did not go through the stages in order, and I believe almost all of us could bounce back and forth between stages, depending on the circumstances.

The extreme reactions to stress were characteristic of only a small percentage of this population, and repatriation teams were surprised at how well the men had endured; the teams had been prepared for many more extremes of behavior than actually showed up. Department of Defense statistics show that the divorce rate for this group is still below the national average of one in three. What,

then, are the characteristics of these men and their families that enabled them not only to survive under stress, but also to grow?

Some of these factors have already been touched on—a sense of humor, a strong sense of purpose: “getting the men home” and “returning with honor.” These factors and others (faith, sense of self worth, family ties and roots) most certainly all aided in our survival. Yet, other individuals have undergone similar trials with similar facilities available to them, but they have not always done so well. Men rose to great heights of courage in those prisons, and their wives became publicly involved far beyond what they or anyone knowing them might have predicted. “In other words, while each man is the product of his inheritance and his personal history, he also carries within him some part or process that breaks from the mold.”¹⁶ What “broke the mold” for these individuals?

There appear to have been two overriding factors that contributed beyond the others and can be extended into all other aspects of our lives—communication and mutual support. Whether tapped through walls of the North Vietnamese prisons or flashed from one chapter of the National Leagues of Families¹⁷ to another, the overriding message was always the same—“Hang in there, Baby. We’re going to win!” Instinctively, the men and their families were acting as facilitators for each other through those years of stress.

In concluding, it seems important to delineate several key issues for others who may experience situations similar to those of my family and hundreds of men, women, and children like us, or who may assist these individuals in their adjustment to a traumatic event, should stress that although Kubler-Ross’s stages are based on

death, they also are experienced in relation to a separation (or divorce). Many have said to me that because I am a psychiatric social worker, because I knew my husband was alive shortly after capture and because our marriage was a healthy one before he left, that I had more advantages. Regardless of these advantages, however, I still went through the same stages as the other POW and MM wives I came in contact with. The stages are valid regardless of the particular circumstances.

Since loss and separation are facts of life, it should again be emphasized that the grieving process in reaction to that loss or separation is necessary and “normal.” In addition, Kubler-Ross’s five stages may be practical tools for assisting the lay person to comprehend and cope with what is happening to him or those around him. However, election, either consciously or unconsciously, by an individual to tarry in one specific stage is not abnormal; it may be necessary and healthy. The Facilitator, accepting the inevitability and desirability of stage progression, should not fight the specific manifestations of each stage. Accepting these manifestations should expedite the progress toward the highest and most productive stage—acceptance. Finally, although mutual support with those experiencing similar stress is often a productive aid to more effective adjustment, the facilitator must realize that the monkey is on the back¹⁸ of the person in crisis and it is necessary for that person to cope with that crisis. A facilitator should not let the person in crisis transfer the monkey to the facilitator’s back. The facilitator must be detached enough to refuse to assume the other person’s basic responsibility to learn to live with the inevitable. Loss is a reality and coping with that loss is a growth-producing experience.

stress, cont'd...

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co... Inc. 1969).

Books by POWs in North Vietnam (*—indicates religious)

Larry Chesley. *Seven Years in Hanoi* (Salt Lake City: Book Craft. Inc...

1973).

John Dramesi, *Code of Honor* (New York: Norton, 1975).

*Ralph Gaicher, *With God in a POW Camp* (Nashville: Broadman.

1973).

*J. N. Helsop and D. H. Van Orden, *From the Shadow of Death* (Salt

Lake City: Desert Books, 1973).

*J. R. Jensen, *Six Years in Hell* (Salt Lake City: Horizon. 1974).

*Eugene B. McDaniel. *Before Honor* (Philadelphia. A. J. Holman

Company, 1973).

John M. McGrath, *Prisoner of War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Prtss,

1975).

Charlie Plumb, *I'm No Hero* (Independence: Independence Press,

1973).

*Robinson Risner, *The Passing of the Night* (New York: Random

House, 1973).

*Howard Rutledge. *In the Presence of Mine Enemies* (Old Tappan. N.J.:

Revell, 1973).

³ In 1971, POW James B. Stockdale, since promoted to vice admiral, had a survey taken among the approximately 350 Americans in the main Hanoi prison camp. The figures here resulted from that survey. At the same time, there was a younger group of prisoners on the Chinese border. They were not included in the survey. No new survey was taken when the younger group joined the main one in 1972.

⁴ The reaction was similar at the release. Men described not wanting to go to sleep, "Because maybe I'll wake up and be back in Hanoi."

*Colin Murray Parkes, *Studies of Grief in Adult Life* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1972) pp. 39-56.

⁶ See list above of books written by POWs.

⁷ Viktor E. Frankel, *Mans Search for Meaning* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), p. 74.

⁸ Later big phone bills came as we moved into the acceptance stage and began working to publicize our husbands' plight.

⁹ Henry Bosworth, "Fear Quincy' Flier Brainwashed," *Boston Traveler*, 12 April 1967, pp. 1, 50. My concern resulted from seeing an unnatural picture of him in *Life*. 7 April 1967. p. 45.

¹⁰ Frankel, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

¹¹ John W. Finney, "7 Former P.O.W.'s Freed of Charges of Aiding Enemy," *The New York Times*. 4 July 1973. pp. 1. 22.

¹² Heather David, *Operation Rescue*, Pinnacle Books, 1971. Dramesi, *op. cit.*

¹³ For examples, consult bibliography of POW books.

¹⁴ Later I heard Doug Hegdahl. the most junior of the POWs in North Vietnam, say he spent some of the happiest days of his life in prison. He based this on the sense of adventure he felt and the quality of his relationship with fellow prisoners. Happiness indeed is a relative thing!

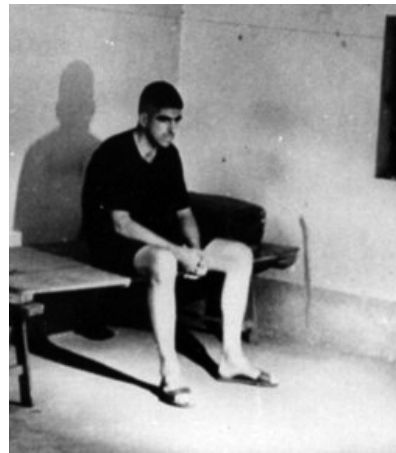
¹⁵ For a statistical analysis, see McCubbin. *et. al. Family Separation end Reunion*, Center for Prisoner of War Studies, Naval Health Research Center, San Diego.

¹⁶ Helen Harris Penman, "Self Determination, Reality or Illusion," *Perspectives on Social Casework* (Philadelphia. Temple University Press, 1971), p. 129.

¹⁷ An organization formed in Southern California by Sybil Stockdale to publicize the plight of the men. It eventually became a national organization with state and local districts which covered the entire country.

¹⁸ "Management Time, Who's Got the Monkey?" *Harvard Business Review*, November-December 1974, pp. 75-80.

Postscript



Stratton Plantation Prison Hanoi, NVN
Smithsonian National Museum of American History

— Alice Stratton's separation from her husband was an unhappy one throughout the six-year period, but there were three when she learned on 5 January 1967 that he had been shot down, when she saw a picture in the 7 April 1967 *Life* magazine which showed him alive but apparently drugged or brainwashed, and when prisoners who were released early conveyed the torture and cruel treatment the POWs were subjected to.

stress, cont'd...

Infrequent Letters Gratefully Received



She received the first letter from her husband near the end of April 1967 and wrote to him the allowed one letter per month until he was released in early 1973. Only about one-fourth of her letters reached him. His correspondence was sporadic, usually two or three letters a year and one period of 14 months when she didn't hear from him at all. Letters from POWs were censored by the North Vietnamese, leaving gaps in the six-line format which often resulted in puzzling, incomprehensible letters.

Mrs. Stratton was fortunate to receive even censored letters because not all POWs were permitted to correspond with their families. She did take comfort in knowing he was alive, conceding, "I had it better- [than those whose husbands were missing in action] because I had something to hold onto."



After Mrs. Stratton and other POW/MIA wives accepted their sense of separation, they exchanged private weeping for public activism to call attention to the plight of their husbands.

When Dick Stratton returned in 1973, his wife was prepared for the worst as a result of the pictures of him which had been published. Instead she found him "not different but better." Both of them had been forced to grow during the separation, and the growth produced a stronger bond between them. Their three sons, all of whom were very young when he was shot down, reacted in different ways during the separation. One was angry, one was sad, and the baby simply picked up his mother's feelings. In the years prior to his return, their image of their father was formed of memories and hopes.



Reunion USNH Oaknoll CA



When he first got back, the children accepted him, but as time went on, they found him unable to live up to the expectations they had created. Thus, reassurances and adjustments began, as Dick Stratton said jokingly, "when they realized I wasn't going to go away

again." There were constant public appearances the first year after his return, but the Strattons began to call a halt to them so they could progress with the adjustments necessary in their own lives.

Introduced to the book *On Death and Dying* during her POW campaign Mrs. Stratton gave it to her husband shortly after his return to help him through the time his father was dying. By discussing the book together, they realized that both of them had experienced the same stages during their separation as Kubler-Ross outlined for a permanent loss. Although she did not realize she was passing through these stages at the time, she was aware of the time when she finally accepted the situation. Occasionally, she passed back into other stages, but upon acceptance, she found it easier to return to that last stage, and worked at staying there. With this in mind, the POW's wife felt that if those who experience a loss or a separation are aware of these stages and realize that they are normal, it might enable them to cope better with their situation—hence this article.



pow/mia

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The passage of time

Another Memorial Day of pause and reflection has passed. More families, more friends, more loved ones, more names to be said aloud - the pledge to remember, renewed again. Flags at half-staff, then raised again to wave over our great land. A sight so desperately needed right now.

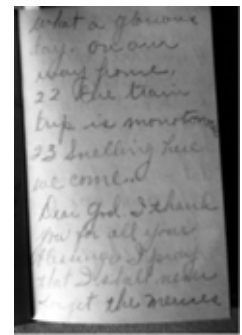
At a Navy reunion in early May, Leon Larson's (former WWII POW, RIP) son walked over to me with a tiny box. He said, "thought you might appreciate this." I opened the box of treasures, to find an old photograph of a soldier from WWII, complete with name and address on the back. With help from Rick Downes (Coalition of Families of Korean & Cold War POW/MIAs), correcting a spelling, we located Frank Salathiel's daughter, and the decades old treasured picture is on its way home.

The box had 2 tiny address books, that were Todd's dad's, one with only one entry - a lady's name, and the "address" entry said "in your heart." The 2nd had an inventory of the uniform items he received, the shirts and jacket and sox etc, neatly written. It contained many, many names with rank and addresses. Old friends? Military brothers?" We will try to trace as well.

The 3rd notebook was an amazing item. Just another pocket size notebook, the handwriting on the pages was Leon's. Todd said, "my dad's diary."

As he left it with me to browse thru the faded green notebook, I turned the tiny pages and started to read. From the first day his camp was liberated, April 26 to the last day he wrote - May 23rd, he jotted a note and a prayer. He was so, so grateful and hoping all was well at home. He was grateful

for a toothbrush, after not having one for many months. Or the bath he finally got to take. It didn't take long to read. But I can't get it out of my head.



What a glorious day. On our way home. 22 the train trip is monotonous. 23 Snelling here we come. Dear God, I thank you for all your blessings. I pray that I shall never forget the mercies.

I shared it with a few friends as we all listened to the sailors chat. None of us had a dry eye when we were done. It felt like we were on that truck, that train, that journey. It was a first-hand account, in his handwriting, in a book found decades after he came home.

Recently, headlines and stories have been seen in the press noting how hard it is to locate relatives of the missing as "it's getting harder to find family members."

The May 23, 2024 NCPR article had part of the search effort noted: "....Then an Army mortuary affairs specialist called Barbara Weiss of New Bern, N.C., trying to identify the official next of kin.

"Everybody they thought of has passed," said Weiss, who is Ferris's niece and was born years after he died.

The mortuary affairs specialist asked if her grandparents or her aunt were still alive.

"And they were asking about my uncle Al," she said. "He was gone. Then they said 'Burtress.' I said, 'That's my mother.' 'Can we talk to her?' And I said she's passed, too."

"Then I said, 'I'm the only one ... I'm the next of kin,' Weiss said.

Weiss agreed to accept her uncle's remains. She helped Army officials arrange a military funeral and graveside service....

pow/mia cont'd...

William "Shorty" Cox is a senior mortuary affairs specialist.... "I'd say about 60 to 70 percent of the ones we're dealing with now never knew the soldier," he said. "The rule is getting more to where you're dealing with great nieces and great nephews and cousins."

In the vast majority of cases, he said, the first family member they reach is willing to serve as the formal next of kin. It helps that the military covers all the costs.

But more and more often now, relatives are so distant and feel so little connection to the dead soldier they don't want to bother.

"I've got a case right now where I've gone through 16 family members, and I can't get a single one of them willing to take up the mantle to bury the soldier," Cox said. "They don't know them, they're busy. And they're just not doing it. I'm working with my last family member now."

If that one says no, the soldier will get an "Army Assumed Burial," meaning the Army stands in for the family, making decisions on where and how he'll be buried...."

If they only knew the sacrifice, the prayers, the broken hearts they never learned about in school. If someone or something had made it personal, maybe they would care. But video games aren't personal, texting has no passion or emotions, and the generations today have no clue how much their freedom cost 80 years ago. TikTok doesn't mention that. They might figure it out when it disappears.

"Those who fail to learn from *history* are *doomed to repeat it*," Winston Churchill said.

Heaven help us.

As of May 2024, the number of Americans Missing and Unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War remains at 1,576 .

civilian

Impressions of an Itinerant Internee: My Varied Lodgings in STIC by Martin Meadows- PART 1

INTRODUCTION Judging from personal experience, two questions have been most frequently directed at former internees of the Japanese civilian concentration camp in Manila known as STIC (Santo Tomas Internment Camp). They have concerned the usual suspects: food, and living conditions (specifically, residential quarters). Those two obvious questions have equally obvious answers — (eventual) starvation diet, and over-crowding — which by now are fairly common knowledge among those even slightly interested in the subject. Thus I have previously ignored those topics in order to discuss other issues [e.g., "Encounters With STIC Guards" (Maurice Francis post of 16 February 2017); "The STIC Tissue Issue," [Part I](#) and [Part II](#), in *Philippine Internment*, 3 January and 16 July 2019.] But I now believe that it would be instructive to revisit the seemingly mundane issue of living conditions, by doing so in a way that fully and clearly illustrates the nature of camp life.

The key question, of course, is how to achieve that objective — and, in so doing, rebut any possible claim that nothing new can be said on the subject. This will be done by means of a purely personal chronicle which covers not just the usual qualitative aspect of camp lodgings (packed rooms, ubiquitous mosquito netting, offensive roommates, etc.), but the quantitative angle as well — meaning in this case specifically, the number and diversity of my STIC accommodations (including in particular one quite extraordinary episode). This emphasis on the wide variety of my camp billets explains the "itinerant" in the title; and, in accord with the Nipponese depiction of STIC as a virtual resort (e.g., see the Manila Sunday Tribune "Pictorial Section" of 12 July 1942), it is herein dubbed "Camp STIC."

This personal record also has what at first glance might seem to be a trivial secondary purpose: to demonstrate the historical relevance and utility of STIC meal tickets. Thus it should be emphasized at the outset that the process of tracing my residential itinerary through STIC was greatly facilitated by the fact that I possess every meal ticket that was issued in the camp, starting in February 1942 — tickets were not issued during the first overly hectic month of January 1942. (According to the *Internews* of 24 January 1942, communal feeding was not scheduled to start until almost February). My complete set of meal tickets,

civilian, cont'd...

February 1942 through February 1945, totals 36 rather than 37 tickets for those 37 months, because one 1944 ticket spanned two months, September and October, no doubt in order to save paper. The tickets' unusual usefulness reflects the fact that they contain the recipient's room number, as well as punched dates, or lack thereof; the absence of such punches makes it possible to ascertain the dates of various occurrences involving the recipient, as the following narrative will make clear. (The meal tickets thus serve, in effect, as at best a partial substitute for my long-lost and long-lamented STIC diary, which decades ago was the victim of a break-in burglary at a friend's Oregon house, where it was stored in the basement with other of my belongings.)

PRE-STIC PORTENTS Omens of my impending itinerancy actually started to appear even before Camp STIC began to welcome its residents. The first such harbinger came at the very start of the Pacific war. It appeared courtesy of our next-door neighbors (on our east side) — the family of Dr. Nicanor B. Reyes, Sr., co-founder and first president of the Far Eastern University, and previously the head of the University of the Philippines economics department. When the Nipponese began bombing in and around Manila — on Pearl Harbor Day, 8 December 1941 in the Philippines — it exposed our unpreparedness, in that we lacked a bomb shelter. After the initial night's attack, during which my parents and I cowered in the blackout darkness in a bedroom, Mrs. Reyes phoned and considerately invited us to shelter in their home during future air raids. We did just that on the

same day she called, and took cover in their "safe room," where the walls were surrounded by layers of sandbags. The fact that such a room already existed seemed to signify that they had anticipated the coming of the war (assuming it had not been hastily prepared on the previous day). In any case, our efforts to seek shelter with our neighbors, though they did not involve overnight stays, could be regarded as foreshadowing changes to come.

[As an aside, the friendly attitude of the Reyes family contrasted with what I perceived as the aloofness of our other next-door neighbors (on our west side), Congressman José Cojuangco and family (who survived the Battle of Manila in 1945, unlike the unfortunate Reyes family).]

Next came a clearer forewarning. Obviously it was unsafe to walk to the Reyes residence during bombings, and extremely inconvenient/difficult to do so when bombings occurred at night, during blackouts. Thus my father quickly had a bomb shelter excavated under the kitchen at the rear of our house. There we were to spend many not-so-happy hours in its stuffy confines, a heavy black cloth covering its entrance to meet blackout requirements; for illumination we of course used candles. Our bomb-shelter phase merits two side-notes. First, whenever air-raid sirens sounded, our cat Snow White would immediately scamper under the refrigerator in the kitchen; and our dog Bobby (named for a deceased friend of mine) would dash into the bomb shelter, getting there long before we did. Second, one of the things we did to pass time in the shelter was play card games, including poker. I will never forget the time I received a pat-hand straight consisting of the eight and nine of spades, the ten of diamonds,

and the jack and queen of spades. I then chose to make an unthinkable move — I discarded the red ten; yet I then received the ten of spades in return, thus filling an inside straight flush (an unbelievable but true story). But more to the point, our nights in the bomb shelter, although in — or rather under — our own house, could be considered another indication of things to come.

Now to the final pre-STIC omen. As Nipponese forces approached Manila toward the latter part of December, General MacArthur declared the capital to be an "open city" (but that did not stop the bombing) and U.S. forces pulled out of the city. Warnings then began to circulate that it would be prudent for Americans and allied civilians who did not reside in Manila's central areas to move there before the invaders arrived. Thereupon our good friends the Rechter family invited us to leave our home in the Malate district and move into their Ermita-district apartment. The family included the mother, Mrs. Rechter (first name forgotten; I never knew what had happened to her husband — I have always assumed he was deceased), and her sons Otto and Joe (who was out of the country at the time, fortunately for him). They were members of a German Jewish family who had left Nazi Germany many years earlier (hence they owned what proved to be — at least until 1945 — protective German passports). Deciding to accept their offer, we packed a few essentials, closed the house, and said goodbye to our two domestic workers (sister and brother Lourdes and Saturnino, from Ilocos Norte province, where they then returned) and our two pets, none of whom we would see again (including the intact house itself). We left our car in our garage, and Otto Rechter transported us to

civilian, cont'd...

the Rechters' apartment building. That move commenced what turned out to be a lengthy and unplanned series of moves after Nipponese forces entered Manila on 2 January 1942.

The invaders immediately ordered "enemy aliens" to report on 4 January 1942 to specified locations, with enough food and belongings to last for their soon-to-be notorious claim of "three days." Heeding the order, my father reported to Rizal Stadium and ended up in STIC not for three days but for over three years (37 months, to be precise). Believing that he would soon return, and hoping (in vain) that her Polish passport would be protective, my mother and I remained with the Rechters. But it quickly became evident that the internees would not be released any time soon, and also that Polish citizens were classified as enemy aliens. Thus to stay with the Rechters not only would be an imposition, it could endanger them. So my mother decided that we should enter STIC voluntarily rather than forcibly. Once again we packed our belongings, said our goodbyes to the Rechters, and, to avoid any possible danger to Otto, we made the trip to STIC not in his car but by carromata (one type of horse-drawn conveyance). The date was 25 January 1942.

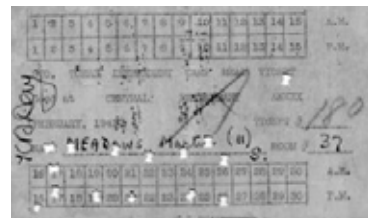
[Note: It was the last time we would see Mrs. Rechter. The Nipponese killed her, and left Otto for dead, during the Battle of Manila in February 1945; but, thanks to a remarkably selfless Filipino passerby, Otto got word of his plight to my father, who saved Otto's life by getting him into the STIC hospital. (As an aside, when I visited Otto and Joe at their import-export business office in

Tokyo in 1953, they had changed their family name to Rector.)] We had previously informed my father when we would arrive, having sent him the news (along with food) through the STIC "package line" on one of our many trips to the camp, during which at times we could spot him standing on the far side of the fence among many other internees awaiting their packages. When we entered STIC, therefore, we learned that my father had already arranged places for us to sleep, complete with cots and mosquito nets (which I assume the Philippine Red Cross had provided, as it had been doing for other internees, after supplies pre-stored in the University in anticipation of war had run out). My mother was assigned to Room 2A, which was located on the first floor at the front, and close to the west side, of the Main Building. She was extremely fortunate that she would not have to undergo the disruptions of having to move from Room 2A, where she lived for the duration of internment. In addition, residence in that room meant not only stability but also that she could enjoy the company of several other Polish women; their presence — the result of requested rather than random assignment — enabled her to again converse in Polish, which she had not spoken since leaving Poland in 1928.

STIC ITINERARY As for me, however, it was a very different story — I was embarking unknowingly on what would be a far more varied and unsettled itinerary. My camp safari was to take me through a wide diversity of rooms, including ones on all three internee-occupied floors of the Main Building. In that respect, it should be pointed out that internees could not use the building's fourth (topmost) floor for residential purposes, both because much of its area was occupied by most of its world-famous natural history museum and by lab equipment and large stacks, and

also because it lacked any bathroom facilities. However, internees were able to put some of the fourth floor to use, by forming classrooms from portions of its area, which although unwallled was subdivided by the cited large stacks (among which, incidentally, I was able to find a few precious sheets of paper, in the form of pre-WWII chemistry exam questions-and-answers.) For purposes of an inclusive historical record, the following account is fairly detailed; to clarify the evolution of my itinerancy, it will number each of the locations where I lived during more than three years in (and out of) Camp STIC — a total of no less than nine separate locations.

(1) That hectic first day in STIC, in such unfamiliar and difficult surroundings, was quite overwhelming. What I most remember about the day is being led to my father's room, which was located on the second floor of the Main Building, toward the center of its east side; there he had prepared a cot with all accessories, as noted. Ordinarily I likely would not be sure of the room's number, because I was there for less than one day, but my February 1942 meal ticket indicates that it was Room 37. All I recall of the place is that it was stiflingly hot and that my cot was placed in the midst of a large group of mostly half-clad, sweating men, with everything situated within a sea of mosquito netting. Just as I was writing this, however, by an amazing and extremely fortuitous coincidence a recent (9 December 2019) Maurice Francis find on the internet suddenly popped up on my computer.



Martin Meadows Feb. 1942 meal ticket while in Room 37

civilian, cont'd...

To my astonishment and delight, the Maurice Francis discovery — which is entitled the “Carr and Ruth Hooper Papers” — provided a strikingly trenchant description of Room 37. On page 5 of his occasionally grammatically-challenged manuscript, titled “Aboard Ship on Way to States,” Carr Hooper writes (with trivial corrections provided): “In Room 37, the first one opened [in STIC] and to which I was assigned, 56 men lived for six months [sic?] snarling and quarreling over every inch of space and every inch of draft of air.” (Perhaps it was just as well, therefore, that I was fated to quickly depart from Room 37.) Given that context, it is not surprising that during my first night in STIC I slept very fitfully; but something else was also involved — I awoke in the morning feeling very sick and with a high fever.

(2) Thus I was taken at once to what was then the camp hospital. Here I do not refer to the much larger building, just outside and adjoining the camp’s eastern wall, the former Santa Catalina Convent and Compound (a building that was later established as the camp’s Santa Catalina hospital, and that was to house the nearly 80 military nurses, most of whom were captured on Corregidor, when they were brought to STIC). Rather I mean a much smaller one-story building located behind and slightly to the east of the Main Building. (I believe that it may have housed the University infirmary previously, and that eventually it served as the camp’s Isolation Ward.). As for the reason I was taken there, my illness turned out to be a serious case of amoebic dysentery, one which was severe enough to keep me in the camp hospital for a full three weeks (judging from the fact that the very first punch on my February meal ticket did not appear until February 15).

How I happened to come down with dysentery on my very first day in STIC has always been a mystery to me. I can explain it only with this lame evasion: that the conjunction of the two events — my arrival in STIC and the onset of dysentery — may or may not have been purely coincidental. (The mystery is accentuated by the fact that, according to the Internews of 10 February 1942, in the previous three weeks only one other case of amoebic dysentery had occurred in the camp — a total of two including mine.) Whatever the case, I was bed-ridden most of the time in the hospital, so there is not much I can say about it, apart from the fact that the notion of privacy was absolutely unknown within its walls. There was no such thing as a shared room, let alone a private room; in fact, there were not even separate rooms at all — rather, all patients were in beds that were placed side by side in a long row in an area extending almost the entire length of the building. Much of the time, though, I felt too sick to care about the conditions there. Apart from that, however, there are three events that took place during my hospital stay that stand out in my memory, as recounted next.

One of them occurred when a nurse who had taken my temperature (using the then standard mercury thermometer) said to another nurse (or aide), who was waiting at the foot of my bed with my next treatment, that the thermometer reading was 106.2° (F); that number has remained vividly etched in my mind ever since. On another occasion, on a daily visit by my parents during the limited visiting hours, my mother told me that on the previous night they had attended the camp’s very first “floor show,” or entertainment program; it had been emceed by entertainer de luxe Dave Harvey, and presented on a stage constructed at the north end of the west patio of the Main Building, where internee families — including

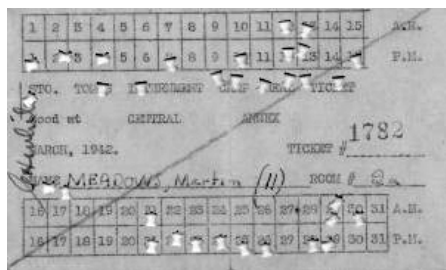
mine — later were to erect the sawali (straw-like) huts that would serve as their makeshift kitchens (depending on the availability of charcoal). I was extremely upset at having missed the show, and I insisted that she describe the various acts that internees had presented. (According to the Internews of 29 January 1942, the first floor show was scheduled for that night.) And lastly, near the end of my hospital stay, a nurse told me that finally it was time for me to get out of bed, for the first time in weeks. She asked if she could help me stand, I said no, tried to get up, and promptly collapsed back onto the bed. But within a few days I had regained much of my strength, was discharged, and happily departed.

(3) As I accompanied my parents out of the hospital into the unaccustomed bright sunshine, little did I realize that I was about to do the equivalent of jumping from the housing frying pan into the lodgings fire. My parents took turns eroding my weakening peace of mind as they proceeded to inform me where I was to reside next, and why. First my father explained that, because of my lengthy absence and the continuing influx of “guests” into the camp, he had been unable to save my space in Room 37 — it had been taken, the room was filled, and it could not accept me. Moreover, my parents did not want me assigned to a room on my own, where I would be a complete newcomer among adult strangers in unfamiliar surroundings. As I absorbed that news, my mother then applied the coup de grace: To my horror she said that she had managed to wangle entry for me into her above-mentioned Room 2A, despite strong objections from her roommates to having an eleven-year-old male in their room.

However, the determined opponents of my intrusion were not to be completely denied — indeed,

civilian, cont'd...

they had succeeded in imposing terms on my entry into their hallowed precincts. I would be allowed into Room 2A on two conditions. First, my bed had to be placed at the southwest corner of the room farthest from the hallway entrance (in a space which was in a sort of niche, under a window at the very front of the building). And second, a sheet had to be hung between my bed and the room, so that while in my corner space I could not see beyond it, and the women would not have to be concerned about my presence. Still, that left unanswered the highly sensitive question of how my comings and goings would be handled — after all, it was unthinkable that a potential voyeur should be permitted unrestricted access to the room, let alone to prowl around it. That issue was not resolved until after I had moved in, at which time the opposition decided on an understandable and not unreasonable — but to me extremely mortifying — procedure, detailed next.



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PART 2 WILL BE IN OCT-DEC 2024 ISSUE.

CPOW

Civilian Ex-Prisoners of War
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TEA IN PARIS (OCTOBER 1969)

the authors are available to present at organizational, clubs, and book groups either online or live and in person? Contact: unwaveringbook@gmail.com.

The Parisian suburb seems unusually quiet. It has been raining for days, scattering and matting clumps of leaves on the sidewalks. A noticeable chill hangs in the air. The sound of heels clicking on the sidewalk pierces the silence as five American women stride in a single file toward a dark stone building surrounded by an imposing wall. Sybil Stockdale has organized the group in formation to keep them focused, on track, and on time. She sighs at her reflection in the puddles. The rain has flattened her new haircut and she is not certain she likes the effect. At forty-four, she feels care-worn compared to the younger women, but she picks up the pace, taking the lead. The overcast skies do little to warm their welcome as they reach the iron gate of the modest building.

Smoothing her skirt, Candy Parish fishes her lipstick from her purse and refreshes the color on her lips without a mirror.

Taking a deep breath, she musters the last bits of energy she has stored for this meeting. A former airline hostess with a striking resemblance to British fashion model Twiggy, Candy is known for her bubbly personality. But the stress of the past year has dampened her spirits. The mother of an exuberant toddler, she spends her days chasing Hunter

around an empty house. Her emotions seesaw between delight in raising her little boy and anxiety over her missing husband. Waiting for any news about his fate has been a torment.

Perhaps it is her burning desire to introduce her son to his father that has brought her to Paris. Maybe it is the urging of naval intelligence officials who have coached her to recall names and faces so she can identify specific people. Or it could be the lure of a confrontation with the North Vietnamese enemy who might be holding her husband captive. Perhaps it is all three. Whatever it is, Candy knows she must take matters into her own hands.

Sybil and Candy are not alone. Three other women and one man accompany them, several meeting for the first time at John F. Kennedy International Airport. The group is advocating for men from each of the armed services, Americans held as prisoners of war, or missing in action in South Vietnam, North Vietnam, or Laos. Sybil Stockdale is *de facto* den mother. Doe-eyed but stoic Mary Ann "Pat" Mearns, a nurse and former airline hostess, is the mother of two young girls. She, too, is seeking answers about her husband, an Air Force aviator missing since 1966. An introvert, she follows Sybil's lead and gets in line. Slender and perfectly manicured Andrea Rander is the only wife of an enlisted man. She is also the only Black woman. Her husband is a POW, captured in South Vietnam during the Tet Offensive in 1968. Statuesque Ruth Ann Perisho, the wife of a naval aviator missing since 1967, rounds out the pack. The lone man, Tom Swain, is the father-in-law of a missing Marine and chief of staff to the governor of Minnesota. He acts as chaperone. This is the 1960s. A group of

women traveling for business without male accompaniment is uncommon.

Sybil has had a hand in recruiting the women to represent a cross section of missing and captive men. They have been holed up for six days at the Intercontinental Hotel in Paris, waiting for the meeting. The plush hotel is far beyond the budgets of these military wives. The bill for their travel and accommodations is being underwritten by defense contractor Fairchild Hiller Aircraft and *Reader's Digest* magazine. American and international media have

been alerted to the risky summit the women are trying to arrange, attending press conferences at the airports in New York and Paris. The women have gone to great lengths to arrange for childcare, as family and friends step in to assist. Sybil frets that nosy reporters might frighten the four boys she has left behind in California. And, as American antiwar protesters grow increasingly aggressive, she yearns to shield her sons from incessant news reports about the growing divide between antiwar activists and those supporting U.S. troops and President Richard Nixon. She knows it seems paranoid, but she worries Communists might kidnap her sons while she is overseas.

All the women are concerned that the meeting with the North Vietnamese might never happen. Nerves are fraying. Candy's suitcase is lost, and she does not have enough cash for new clothes in a place like Paris. Women did not have credit cards in 1969. She keeps recycling the puffy-sleeved outfit she wore on the plane and she borrows Ruth Ann's hair rollers.

tea, cont'd...

Other than letting the women embark on one two-hour shopping excursion, Sybil has sequestered the group in the hotel. She has forbidden them from talking to anyone—especially to the media. They feel like prisoners in one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Tempers flare and bickering ensues.

To combat fears and boost morale, Sybil sets rules and a daily schedule. Each morning, she musters the group in her room. Armed with a yellow legal pad, and whipping out the pencil stashed behind her ear, she drills the wives. She has them rehearse the statements they are going to make—if they secure a meeting. Then she fires questions as they sit side-by-side on a settee, Sybil coaching their delivery until their answers are just right. If reporters show up, *only* she and Tom will talk. That week, Sybil “was both den mother and dictator,” Andrea remembers. “I looked up to her.” By day four, the women know how to make their case.



(L to R) Andrea Rander, Pat Mearns, Sybil Stockdale, Candy Parish, Tom Swain, and Ruth Ann Perisho, at a stop near the Luxor Obelisk and the Louvre, Paris, October 1969. Reporters followed them whenever they left their hotel. (Photo courtesy of Pat Mearns.)

Dressed conservatively, Sybil resists the ubiquitous and trendy miniskirts. Her jowls belie her age and weariness, but she has a hearty laugh that lights up her face. That is, when she allows herself to laugh. Serving as the anchor for this group, she is determined and decisive, but can seem unapproachable.

Her husband's long absence—longer than any of the other women's husbands—weighs her down. She is also weighed down by a secret she keeps. Sybil knows that her husband and other POWs in Hanoi are being tortured. She cannot share what she knows or how. The others attribute the anguish etched on her face to age and weariness. This is a serious mission. Candy overhears Sybil telling Pat Mearns that she would *manage* the upstarts on the trip. Put off by the comment, Candy may not grasp the burden Sybil carries.

Sybil wants the group to place the North Vietnamese on the defensive. There isn't much the women can control on this trip, but they should master their emotions. Be calm and cool, she tells herself—and the others.

Before breakfast, Sybil dials the North Vietnamese delegation on the black rotary phone in her hotel room. In a rehearsed and professional voice, she firmly requests a meeting. A representative from the delegation answers icily and curtly: *The ladies will have to wait*. Each afternoon, Sybil sits by the phone, in anticipation of a return call. She has been advised not to contact the U.S. embassy in Paris unless there is an emergency.

Officially, there is no government sponsorship of this trip. They are on their own. But Sybil, Candy,

and Ruth Ann received *unofficial* guidance from their contacts in the military intelligence community. They were shown photos of North Vietnamese officials and taught to remember what they might see, hear, and observe, especially, any notable physical reactions.

As the sun sets each afternoon, the group grows more anxious. Five long days tick by, each blending into the next. They are in Paris, the city of lights and love, but surrounded by overcast skies, and only a few miles from the enemy. How patient should they be? They are not experienced in international diplomacy and have limited financial resources. October 4, the sixth day, dawns gray and drizzly. It is a Saturday and hopes for a weekend meeting are dim. Sybil sips her coffee, thinking about how to keep the group engaged. Nearly jumping out of her chair, she grabs the armrest when the phone rings. Her heart skips a beat when she hears the cold voice that she has been talking to every morning. “Please come to Choisy-le-Roi, this afternoon at 4:00 p.m., for tea.” Click.

The building that beckons in Choisy-le-Roi serves as the Parisian offices of the delegation from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam). For more than a year, protracted negotiations called the Paris Peace Talks have been taking place there between the Communist regime of North Vietnam, the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), and the United States. Little progress has been made. Back home, nightly news broadcasts highlight how long it takes to agree upon laborious details like the size and shape of the negotiating table. Meetings are

tea, cont'd...

held weekly, something Sybil is grateful the POWs do not know. "It wasn't a very convincing demonstration that either side was anxious for progress," she noted. Increasingly, she is cynical about the war and her country's leadership.

As she performs her last rehearsal alone, in front of the hotel mirror, Sybil's anxiety is overwhelming. She is exhausted, even though she has been taking a sleeping pill each night. She has been dry heaving. But she does not want anyone to know. Candy recognizes her emotional distress. "She was on her way to a nervous breakdown.... Something was off. It just wasn't right."

Sybil plows on. This is their one shot to request an *in person*, honest, and full accounting of the men the North Vietnamese are holding captive and those that are missing. She reviews the script and the plan with the group one last time. They grab their notes, powder their noses, and head out for the forty-minute taxi ride. North Vietnamese officials meet them at the gate, escorting them into a dimly lit room. Spacious, it is sparsely decorated. Oriental rugs cover a worn wooden floor, low-slung furniture is arranged around two Formica-topped tables, a picture of oxen hangs on a wall, and a model of an oxcart sits on the table. Coarse linen curtains make the room seem even darker and the mood heavier. But they do not muffle the dissonant sound of someone playing billiards nearby.

Four slender and diminutive North Vietnamese officials in drab suits with Mandarin collars stand silently, watching the

group intently. When the men sit down, their too-short pants reveal skinny socks and pale, scrawny legs. Sybil is in a deep easy chair with heavily upholstered cushions facing Xuan Oanh, the senior representative of the delegation. Later, she describes him as "enigmatic looking." The other three men never introduce themselves. Sybil makes meticulous mental notes of what they look like, assigning them mnemonic nicknames: "Brown Suit," "Mr. X," and "Glasses."

The deep seats make it awkward for the women to sit politely in skirts. Andrea's knees rise close to her face. Convinced the seating is intended to unnerve them, Candy almost giggles out loud, while she struggles for modesty. An image of Ho Chi Minh, the recently deceased North Vietnamese prime minister and president, looms over the group. It may be a photograph, but he is an ominous presence.

The gloom casts a sense of doom over the group. Andrea's eyes dart around, as she squints at the doors. What is behind them? Naïvely, she believes her husband might be at this house ready to return with her to the United States. Tea, stale crackers, and Vietnamese candies are served. It is a strange tea party. The group sips from cups, trying to balance their saucers and steady their shaking hands from clanking the porcelain cups. The North Vietnamese stare blankly at the women.

Sybil gives the signal to Candy. She clears her throat, sits forward, and recites her statement, pleading for information about her husband, Navy Lt. Charles "Chuck" Parish, missing for more than a year.

Why can't they tell her if he is alive or dead?

"Well," responds Oanh, "it is difficult to know whether men are missing in Vietnam or not because of various reasons, either because other countries are involved, or because some planes are shot down over water, some are lost at night, some are on fire." He asks her to write down the specifics of Chuck's shoot down and loss date. Then: "He told me I reminded him of his younger sister." He says her husband has just been killed by an American bomb. Oanh pauses, letting his statement sink in. Candy is not naïve. She knows what he is trying to do. Somehow, she finds him personable. Even though she knew he was a politician, skilled in poker-face diplomacy, "he seemed warmer than the others, at least to me."

Ruth Ann speaks next, then Andrea, who is terrified. Unlike the other missing and captive men, Donald works in military intelligence and has briefed her to *never* discuss his work. "But I had to say who I was...and that I knew by then that he had been captured in the south."

Andrea wonders if their hosts suspect the women are dupes of their government. And what do they think of *her*? "They see this brown face in there. Look what's going on in the United States, you know? People are being killed, and the civil rights are going on." They must wonder, she thinks, how did *she* get involved?

Next up is Pat. Carefully, she recounts what she knows of the incident where her husband, Air Force Maj. Arthur Mearns, was shot out of the sky on November 11, 1966. She beseeches her

tea, cont'd...

hosts: "What do I tell my children?" They have been without a father *for almost three years*. Silence. "They just sat there. Their faces were placid."

Tom speaks about his missing son-in-law. Finally, it is Sybil's turn. Although she has practiced her statement many times, she is too nervous to recite it from memory. But she cannot see. Darkness is descending, and the room is awash in shadows. Sybil asks to borrow reading spectacles from "Glasses." He acquiesces, slowly handing them to her. For a few seconds, all pretenses fall away, giving her a fleeting sense of control. Sybil relishes the moment.

She relays her husband's shutdown and capture. "I know Jim was injured, but I have no evidence his injuries have been given proper treatment." Sybil wants a report for each captive's circumstances and an accounting for the missing, as required by the 1954 Geneva Convention.

An awkward silence fills the room. Suddenly, stone-faced Oanh stands up, pulling a folded *New York Times* article with a photo of Sybil from his pocket. "We know all about you, Mrs. Stockdale." Sybil blinks, staring back at him. The ticking of a clock in the background mimics her pounding heart. He leers, "Does it not seem strange to you that for so many months the government was not concerned and talking about the prisoners and missing? And then the government started talking about them and women started coming to Paris. Your government is using wives and families to draw attention away from the crimes and aggressions they are committing."

Sybil can almost feel the blood congealing in her veins. Oanh

continues: "We know you are the founder of this movement in your country and we want to tell you we think you should direct your questions to your own government." This is what the U.S. government had been warning the wives about for years. Talking in public might hurt their husbands and hamper the U.S. government's ability to negotiate their release. *Keep quiet!* they have been told repeatedly during the past four years.

Clenching her jaw, Sybil composes a careful response, citing the list of government offices she and the rest of the wives have visited on Capitol Hill and elsewhere.

She does not reveal that she has been unable to get an audience with the new president, Richard Nixon. Dull stares from the North Vietnamese: it does not seem to matter what she says. Her spirits sink.

Out of his pocket, Oanh fishes a letter from a group of North Vietnamese women to American wives of POWs and MIAs. He apologizes for the poor translation and reads aloud: "You don't really know what trouble is compared to our trouble. We want to live in peace with you. American prisoners get food which some of us have to go without so the Americans can be well fed." Sybil knows otherwise.

Candy watches the tennis match of words between Sybil and Oanh intently, trying to memorize the faces of the four North Vietnamese men. "Mr. X's" beady eyes reveal his disdain. He sneers when Sybil speaks. Candy absorbs details about the room and the conversation so she can debrief Pentagon intelligence officers when she returns home.

The women hand over a thick stack of letters—some 700 of them—from 500 families of missing and

captive men, requesting delivery. Oanh reluctantly takes the bundle, making no guarantees. Furthermore, he questions why the women claim they are receiving so little news from their men. "I believe that letters from your husbands are being confiscated by the Pentagon or the State Department."

Dismissively, Oanh says it is not necessary for more relatives to visit the delegation. And inquiries about men captured in South Vietnam should be addressed to Madame Binh, the Communist leader representing the National Liberation Front at the Paris Peace Talks. They will be answered by mail. But when and where? He refuses to say.

The women are ushered into another room to watch two propaganda films. The first documents the impact of U.S. napalm attacks in Vietnam. While it is designed to repulse, the graphic videos do not shock them. For Candy, "The napalm was horrific, but it was war." They have seen worse images on the evening news, which has fueled the growing antiwar movement in the United States. Just six months ago, students took over the administration building at Harvard University to protest the war. One month earlier, thousands of young people descended onto a farm in upstate New York for a rock music festival featuring performances from popular musicians including Jimi Hendrix, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Arlo Guthrie, and Joan Baez, some performing explicitly anti-war protest songs. The three-day festival, dubbed Woodstock, is a symbol of the counterculture movement wending

its way through society. Resentment toward the war and those fighting it has been growing exponentially. An element of American society has come to

tea, cont'd...

believe the North Vietnamese are innocent victims, that most soldiers are "baby killers," guilty of atrocities, fighting an unjust war. The propaganda film supports those assertions, but the women are undaunted. They have faced resentment from fellow Americans everywhere they go.

The next film documents "humane" treatment of American POWs in North Vietnam. The women wince at the sight of gaunt men, straining to see if they recognize any faces. Then, the overhead lights are turned on and the North Vietnamese search for reactions from the Americans. Along with Tom, the five women put on their best poker faces.

After several cups of tea, several of the ladies desperately need the restroom. Their hosts escort them down the hall. Once alone, the women let out a collective sigh, exchanging furtive glances. They dare not speak candidly, for fear the bathroom is bugged. Sybil is the last to leave and has a few moments to herself. She stares at herself in the mirror. The fluorescent lights accentuate the look of exhaustion. Refreshing her lipstick, she blots her lips neatly on one of the guest towels, leaving a kiss for the North Vietnamese.

After the screening, the ladies are brought back to the "tearoom" for more refreshments and more lectures on how tough life is in Vietnam. As Andrea sneaks a piece of stale candy into her purse "to prove I was there," she and the rest of the group are given a primer on the dessert they are being served. It is candy made of rice flour, honey, and sesame seeds, prepared by Vietnamese women for women. Vietnamese

men only eat hard candy. Would they like the recipe?

After two and a half hours, the Americans emerge from the peculiar encounter into the black of night. A small group of reporters emerges from the darkness. The women are not surprised to see them, but they are weary and wary.

"What will you do now that you've had your visit here?" one reporter asks Sybil as he thrusts a microphone toward her face. "Go back to the hotel and get some rest," Sybil replies. "We're so tired."

A male reporter sneers: "Ohhhh, yes." Some members of the international press corps seem unsympathetic to the plight of the POW and MIA families. Their taunting tone is disheartening. Tom Swain deftly briefs the reporters: the North Vietnamese have reassured them they will investigate and notify families about the status of their missing and captured relatives. After the questions stop, the women and Tom are alone on the deserted street. The silence is disquieting.

The women try to buoy each other's spirits. "We felt very dejected afterwards," Pat admits. "The one thing we accomplished is we were *there* and we made a statement by our presence." While they agree the meeting *was* risky, they believe it was worth it. Pat is convinced that "Glasses" knows her husband. She detected a glimmer of recognition when "Arthur Mearns" was mentioned. That lifts her mood a bit. Ruth Ann points out that it was an opportunity to get to know the North Vietnamese. Ironically, the wives have been unable to schedule an audience with their own president, Richard Nixon.

With only a verbal promise from the North Vietnamese and no real expectation it will be fulfilled, letdown settles in. Perhaps it is the gloomy weather, or the pressure has taken its toll. The growing din of antiwar sentiment—from the media, from other average Americans—is drowning out the women's voices. Why will the Nixon administration, the State Department, and the most powerful military in the world not do more to secure better treatment for the men and get them released? Why are they, private citizens with no political experience, forced to be the face of international diplomacy? And why won't President Nixon meet with them?

Shortly after Sybil returns home, a new group of American anti-war activists called the New Mobilization Committee informs her that the North Vietnamese government plans to release any comprehensive list of POWs to *them*, not the U.S. government nor the wives. The North Vietnamese will manage the POW/MIA issue to their advantage. The wives who went to Paris will be forced to work with the antiwar movement for any tidbit of information. The irony is not lost on Sybil.

The State Department suggests she respond to the North Vietnamese. Since the U.S. government is not planning to protest this arrangement, Sybil complies. "To force the prisoners' families to apply to such a political organization is an unnecessary exploitation of their helplessness. It only diminishes the humanitarianism of the gesture your country is making in releasing the list of the prisoners. The world will see no logic, only vindictiveness, in such an arrangement." Her telegram is delivered to Xuan Oanh. She receives no reply.

WWII POW Hero Celebrates 100th Birthday



James D. Gilles celebrated his 100th birthday surrounded by his family and friends on June 2, 2024. At age 18, in March 1943, he entered the Army. In December 1944, a Battery Clerk in the 590th Field Artillery, 106th Division, Dad was deployed on the Siegfried Line in Belgium. Hitler's counteroffensive -- now infamously known as the Battle of the Bulge -- began on December 16th; soon Dad's unit was overrun. Instead of surrendering, he with others attempted to reach reestablished American lines. Although Dad sustained back and ankle shrapnel injuries, he managed to join other unit remnants at Saint Vith. Without ammunition, these units including Dad, soon surrendered.

Dad's ankle injury was the most serious; fortunately, a German surgeon successfully operated without amputation. POWs had to endure very poor physical conditions with minimal nutrition -- many perished. As Allied forces pushed Germans into Germany, POWs were moved from one prison to others more distant from front lines. With other POWs, Dad had to march hundreds of kilometers and perform hard labor in extreme winter conditions. Dad's ankle had an open wound, his boots didn't fit properly, and he needed a brace to walk. POWs were also transported to other prisons via unmarked railroad boxcars that were crowded, unsanitary, and lacking sufficient water and food. Fear was a constant companion -- rumors of POW executions, Allied strafing or bombing together with sickness and malnutrition were persistent dangers.

In April, Nuremburg POWs walked more than 100 kilometers to another prison -- for this march Dad had a single boot. Yet, Dad survived, weighing 98 pounds when liberated at Moosburg on April 29, 1945. When asked, Dad maintains that his faith carried him through that fearful time--as it continues to guide him today. In June 1945, he returned state side and resumed courting Elaine Kleist -- they married on Thanksgiving, 1947. Together, they raised their family and continued to delight in their life together for 73 years. Quite honestly, Dad never talked about the dangers he faced in those dark days while serving our country until we were adults, married, with our own children. Only as he began to share his stories did we begin to appreciate how fortunate he was to have survived.

Undoubtedly, Dad's World War II POW experience profoundly shaped his life in ways that we will never fully comprehend. Surely his courage, resilience and fortitude confronting death early in life provided an enduring foundation for later challenges. In contrast to the cruelty of war, Dad's unconditional commitment, affection, and love for Mom and family and his generous compassion for others -- sharing time, talents and resources is exemplary. Similarly, his first-hand encounter with War's destruction must heighten his appreciation for everyday moments -- like the enjoyment he takes from nurturing flowers to his genuine interest in his grandchildren and now, great grandchildren. In honor of James D. Gilles, our dad, and our American Hero. We are grateful and proud to be his children.
David Gilles, Steve Gilles, and Ann Jadin

James Donald Gilles	Serial # 3681081	POW#095573
#590 Field Artillery Battalion	#1 Stalag XII A Limburg	#2 Stalag XIII C Hammelburg
#3 Stalag XIII Nuremberg	#4 Stalag VII A Moosburg	

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A number of years ago, one of our members made the decision to establish a bequest to the American Ex-Prisoners of War. He felt strongly that he truly cared about our future and wanted to leave a legacy to us. He and his wife are now gone, but their generous gift enabled them to demonstrate in a very meaningful way their commitment to AXPOW.

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Your generous support of our programs over the years has made a tremendous difference to ex-POWs and their families. Please take a few minutes of your time to help ensure our future. And feel free to contact CFO Marsha Coke at axpow76010@yahoo.com, or CEO Cheryl Cerbone at axpowceo@comcast.net. Phone #817-649-2979.

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GENERAL FUND

In memory of my husband, Ernest Bidmead, by Janice Bidmead



taps



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ESTABROOK, Wilbert "Shorty", of Murrieta, CA died March 10, 2024. He was captured during the Korean War while serving with the 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. Shorty was very active in the Tiger Survivors group of former POWs. He was also a life member of AXPOW.

FAGAN, Robert J., of Rosenberg, TX passed away March 24, 2024 at age 100. He was captured while serving with Co. B, 299th Combat Engineers, landing on Utah Beach on D-Day. He was captured during the Battle of the Bulge and held at Stalag 4B, Stalag 4F and a work camp in Lubsdorf. Robert was a life member of AXPOW and the Gulf Coast Chapter. His wife of 68 years, Bessie, predeceased him. He leaves 3 daughters, 6 grandchildren, 9 great-grandchildren, 8 great-great-grandchildren and their families.

GERUE, Ray A, of Kingman AZ, died April 16, 2024. He was born Dec 8, 1924. An AXPOW life member since 1991, Ray served in the 143 Inf Reg, 36 Div. He was held in Stalag 2A, 2B, 3B and others. He is survived by his wife, Patricia. Both were members of the Mohave Chapter.

KING, Donald J, 100 (12 days shy of his 101st birthday) passed away in Franklin, IN on Apr. 28, 2024. He was captured while serving with the 106th Inf. Div during the Battle of the Bulge. His wife of 75 years predeceased him; he leaves 3 daughters, 1 son, 6 grandchildren, 4 great-grandchildren and numerous nieces and nephews. He lived a long, full life and will be greatly missed by friends and family.

NAVILLE, Herman F., age 93, of Floyds Knobs, IN died Feb. 17, 2024. He served in the Army during the Korean War and was a POW for 37 months. Herman is survived by his wife of nearly 70 years, Marcella, 5 children and many grand- and great-grandchildren. He lived a life of gratitude and appreciation for friends, family and freedom.

STAGNER, Frank H., 91, of Chico, CA, a proud veteran of the USAF (1953-1957) passed away May 3, 2024 surrounded by his beloved son and daughter. He, along with his parents and three siblings, was a civilian internee in the Santo Tomas Internment Camp, Manila, Philippines during WW II. Of his interned family, Frank was the last surviving member. Kind-hearted and with a quick wit, Frank treasured spending time with his extended family and friends. His hobbies included photography, reading, biking, and traveling. Throughout his life, Frank also enjoyed documenting his family's experiences during WW II. He had been a life member of AXPOW. Frank lived a long and full life, and he will be missed.

VILES, Kenneth Leslie, 91, died Mar. 1, 2024. In 1951, Ken joined the Army and was sent to Korea. The evening before his 19th birthday, Ken was captured, became a prisoner of war for almost two years and suffered immensely. After release, Ken married his high school sweetheart, Myrna. She predeceased him. Survivors include 3 children, 15 grandchildren, 35 great-grandchildren and 2 great-great-grandchildren.



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