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AIR WAR COLLEGE
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POW: IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU

by

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A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH

REQUIREMENT

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AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT SUMMARY

TITLE: POW: It Could Happen To You

AUTHOR: Leon F. Ellis, Jr., Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

The author contends that a knowledge of previous POW experiences will help future POWs to better resist and survive. The enemy will exploit the POW as in the past and the POW must resist, using all available resources--leadership, personal courage, military organization, and communications systems. The future POW needs an understanding of the amazing recuperative abilities of the human body and its ability to sustain itself on a substandard diet. Past POW experiences prove the critical role that an active mind plays in psychological health. Constant mental occupation is a necessity to survival in a POW situation, not only to pass time, but also to maintain a positive attitude. The author draws from his 5½ years as a POW in North Vietnam and concludes on an optimistic note.

The POWs of the past were not unique; resistance and survival will be achievable goals for the POWs of the future.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel Leon F. Ellis, Jr., USAF (B.A., University of Georgia) flew 54 combat missions over North Vietnam in the F-4C Phantom fighter-bomber. In November 1967 while performing an armed reconnaissance mission, his aircraft was hit by antiaircraft artillery fire. Colonel Ellis ejected from his disabled aircraft and was immediately captured by the North Vietnamese militia.

During his internment, Colonel Ellis lived in most of the main prison camps of North Vietnam: Hoa Lo (Hanoi Hilton), Son Tay, Camp Faith, Camp Unity, Dogpatch, and the Plantation. He served as the chief communicator in his room in each of these camps. Colonel Ellis was repatriated 14 March 1973, during Operation Homecoming. He was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor Device, Legion of Merit, and Silver Star for his performance as a POW.

Colonel Ellis re-qualified for flying duties in 1973. He was assigned as a T-38 instructor pilot at Moody AFB, Georgia, and Randolph AFB, Texas, holding positions of flight commander, section commander, and chief of standardization and evaluation. He graduated from the Armed Forces Staff College, Norfolk, Virginia, in 1978 and was assigned as a staff officer to Headquarters Air Training Command. From July 1980 to June 1982, Colonel Ellis commanded the 560th Flying Training Squadron, Randolph AFB, Texas. Colonel Ellis is a graduate of the Air War College, class of 1983.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Chapter</u>		<u>Page</u>
	DISCLAIMER-ABSTAINER-----	ii
	SUMMARY-----	iii
	BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH-----	iv
I	INTRODUCTION-----	1
II	RESISTANCE TO EXPLOITATION-----	3
	Enemy Goals-----	3
	Resistance to Interrogation-----	4
	Resistance to Propaganda-----	6
	Resistance to Indoctrination-----	8
	Courage in Resistance-----	11
	Leadership in Resistance-----	11
	Military Organization in Resistance-----	13
	Communication: The Sinew of Resistance and Survival--	14
III	SURVIVAL-----	18
	A Sound Body-----	18
	A Sound Mind-----	20
	A Strong Faith-----	22
IV	CONCLUSION-----	23
	APPENDIX A: Code of Conduct for Members of the Armed Forces of the United States-----	25
	APPENDIX B: Camp Regulations-----	30
	APPENDIX C: Fourth Allied POW Wing Policies-----	33
	APPENDIX D: The Tap Code-----	40
	LIST OF REFERENCES-----	41

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As you ingress on your second combat mission of the day, your flight leader reports heavy automatic weapons and AAA fire in the target area. Puffs of flak clutter the air in front of your aircraft; you make a jink, but continue toward the target. You hold a stable path long enough to acquire the target, press the pickle button, and release ordinance. Just as you start a hard turn for home plate, the aircraft absorbs a tremendous blow. It shudders and jerks like a boxer who has been stopped in his tracks by a smashing uppercut. A second later the cockpit fills with smoke and the aircraft starts to tumble and come apart. Your experience and survival instinct say get out; without a second thought, you execute bail-out procedures carefully ingrained through years of repetitive training. The ejection system works exactly as advertised. As you are floating down in your parachute, you see the enemy waiting below with open arms. For the first time the reality hits you. I am about to become a POW.

If you are like most, you probably have not given much thought to the possibility of being a prisoner of war (POW). In the scenario above, you have been placed in a position that seems unthinkable. Yet the odds are high that some Americans will once again be called upon to endure a POW situation. The purpose of this paper is to prepare you for the possibility of being a POW or hostage by making you aware of what to expect and what has helped others in past POW experiences.

Why should I care? Why do I want you to think the unthinkable? The scenario I described is not from a Hollywood script; it is the sequence of events that occurred to me on 7 November 1967. I never thought it could happen to me either. But it did! And in fact it happened to half a dozen people who were in my circle of friends before I was shot down.

Contrary to what you might think, being a POW is not an impossible mission. There are plenty of ordinary guys like me around to testify to that. On the other hand, I believe that knowing what others encountered and how they coped will enable you to be much better prepared to resist, survive, and return with honor.

CHAPTER II
RESISTANCE TO EXPLOITATION

Enemy Goals

As a prisoner of war (POW), you must face the reality that your capture was most likely motivated by political and not humanitarian reasons. Ultimately, the POW is a hostage--a political pawn to be used for bargaining purposes at the negotiating table. Potential adversaries of the United States know the value our society places on a human life. They know of the American public's involvement in the POW/MIA (missing in action) issues during and since the Vietnam war. Our future enemies will probably hold a different view of the worth of an individual. Based on POW experiences in Korea and Vietnam, the prospects are that our future enemies will try to exploit POWs in every way possible. This is the challenge for the POW. Even though he or she has surrendered to the enemy, the task is to continue the fight by resisting exploitation and ultimately denying the enemy his goals.

What does the enemy want? If examples from recent conflicts are followed, our enemy will pursue three goals:

1. To "break" the POW and extract military information from him immediately after capture.
2. To coerce the POW into making anti-US propaganda statements.
3. To indoctrinate the POW and gain his willful cooperation in opposing the US war effort.

To achieve these goals, the North Vietnamese resorted to torture, threats, isolation, "good guy" treatment, and every possible method of

deceit and chicanery. How should you prepare to cope with such frightening realities? The first step is to study the experiences of other POWs. By reviewing some lessons from the Hanoi experience, I believe you will be better prepared to be a successful resistor.

Resistance to Interrogation

For those who were shot down and captured near a large city like Hanoi, there was good news and bad news. The good news was that they would be moved quickly to the security of a main prison and thus avoid the wrath of the populace; the bad news was that they could expect to be interrogated within a matter of hours for military information. In keeping with the Code of Conduct (appendix A), American fighting men refused to answer questions beyond name, rank, service number, and date of birth. The typical North Vietnamese response to this line of resistance was physical torture.

A common form of torture used ropes to make a pretzel out of a man's arms and upper torso. First the POW's arms were tied behind his back so tightly that his elbows touched and circulation was cut off. Then his arms were lifted over his head, tearing muscles in the shoulders and chest and forcing his head down to his knees. The pain from this torture was excruciating; sometimes people lasted 15 minutes, sometimes hours. Our experience was that most men could be forced to answer something more than the first "four questions." One POW who was captured near Hanoi in May of 1967 describes his initial ordeal this way:

I was interrogated by some professionals. They were very concerned because Hanoi was again being attacked for the first time in

six months. They were concerned about what targets we were going to hit next. We did not know any targets because we had a policy on the ship that only the skipper knew.

I went through the ropes four times in a two-and-a-half day period, and I remained in leg irons for the entire time . . . and wrist irons. I was blindfolded a lot of the time, and I was beaten. During the second day, I had to tell them something. I had to give them names. I gave them names of people who had gotten out of the Navy, false squadrons. (14:135)

Initial interrogations such as the one described above seldom yielded any significant military information, because combatants seldom knew anything of intelligence value. These interrogations served another purpose, however, which seemed even more important to the North Vietnamese--to break the will and force the submission of the POW. They knew we were determined to follow the Code of Conduct. To allow POWs to follow the Code would have been an admission that we had a certain degree of free will and that they did not have us fully at their mercy. What the enemy underestimated was that even though we Americans could be forced to submit, we would continue to struggle in every way possible to deny them their objectives and bounce back for the next round.

The philosophy of rebounding developed out of experience and necessity. The first time a POW is forced to give in to the demands of the enemy, his sense of shame and defeat is overwhelming. He feels that he has committed treason and is unworthy of ever wearing a uniform again. He also feels that having given in, he will be asked to do more and thus faces more torture and more disgrace. We learned the importance of bouncing back from the physical and emotional low caused by this giving-in ordeal. Our communication network, which will be discussed in more detail later, provided a lifeline to reach out to such a beleaguered soul. Hearing a "way to hang in there" and learning that

you were still an accepted number of the group, and that others had been forced to submit in like manner, was a tonic which hastened this bouncing back process. And the men would need to bounce back. From 1965 through 1969 there was plenty of exploitation to resist.

The critical lessons to be learned about resistance to interrogation are that you must strive to uphold the ethical values of the Code of Conduct, but have a fallback line of resistance if you are broken. Do not languish in guilt when you have given in; others have been down that path and will understand. Get back on your feet for the next round and remember: you are not alone. Your fellow Americans in the prison and millions back home are pulling for you.

Resistance to Propaganda

Most Vietnam POWs learned early about exploitation for propaganda. Some were exposed to Communist and Third World news media immediately after their capture to show US vulnerability and to enhance the international image of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV: North Vietnamese government). Americans captured in the hinterlands of North Vietnam were often used for internal propaganda. These newly captured aircrews were displayed to the local villagers and peasants to show the great victories of the Communist party and to generate hatred against the US. In my case, political cadres used bullhorns to address the crowds assembled to view this American pilot. The cadres gave pep-rally type speeches reminiscent of those given by Adolph Hitler in the 1930s and incited the crowd into a frenzy of anti-US emotion. On one occasion the crowd turned into a lynch-mob, forcing my guards and me to

flee through a secret exit. The next day during another village rally, the crowd attacked the guards in an attempt to get me. Our quick-thinking driver used the truck to force his way through the crowd; the chief guard opened the door just in time for us to jump inside and avoid the sickle blade of an angry old woman. The truck moved slowly forward, pushed aside the crowd, and we made our getaway.

These examples demonstrate how the POW can be used for internal propaganda and the emphasis the North Vietnamese placed on keeping POWs alive. There is no way a POW can effectively deny this type of propaganda. He must protect himself and concentrate on survival. Fortunately for me, the North Vietnamese military had orders to protect POWs and bring them in alive. In spite of my close calls, I was impressed by the discipline of the Communist party and the military as they carried out their instructions.

The enemy's main efforts for propaganda have been to embarrass the United States and thus make political gains in the struggle for support of world public opinion. In the Korean War American POWs were tortured to sign false germ-warfare confessions. (29:147) The officers of the USS Pueblo were tortured to sign false confessions to spying in Korean territorial waters. (19:212) Vietnam POWs were tortured for anti-war statements, war crimes confessions, and other statements embarrassing to the US government. From 1965 until 1969 the North Vietnamese frequently resorted to physical abuse to force the POWs to make propaganda. Although they were able to force POWs to make statements, what they got was often of little or no value. Even though the

POWs were forced to submit, they still tried to deny the enemy's goals or at least minimize his gain.

The story of Senator Jeremiah Denton (then Commander Denton) illustrates how the POW fights with his head as well as with his body to deny the enemy success. Senator Denton was brutally tortured until he submitted to meet with several foreign correspondents equipped with movie cameras. Although he was under the threat of more torture, he carefully worded his answers to present a pro-US position. Still he knew there was a risk that his words would be edited and his true situation would not be projected. Senator Denton was one who always looked for a way to fight back, and as he blinked in front of the bright camera lights, he struck on a brilliant idea--a perfect way to send a signal. He began to blink in morse code: T-O-R-T-U-R-E. Fortunately this film clip made its way back to the US, and Naval intelligence caught the message. This was the first proof that US officials received that American POWs were being tortured. (8:91-94) Senator Denton's heroics illustrate how a POW who has been forced to submit can stay in the fight and win the battle.

Resistance to Indoctrination

The North Vietnamese had an extensive program of indoctrination to convince us that they were innocent victims of US aggression. They constantly told the POWs that the "military-industrial complex" was deceiving the American people and promoting the war for profit. For hours each day the camp radio would drone on with stories of US "war crimes," the "Communist" version of Vietnamese history, and anti-war

articles gathered from around the world. The North Vietnamese especially like to expose us to anti-war statements by prominent Americans such as former Senator William J. Fulbright (Democrat, Arkansas).

I remember a tape played the day I arrived at the Hanoi Hilton. The speaker was introduced as an anti-war activist named Tom Hayden, a prominent leader in the Students for Democratic Society (SDS) at the University of Michigan. I later learned that Hayden had married actress Jane Fonda. Movies and tapes of her visit to North Vietnam were part of our captor's propaganda program. It was appalling to the POWs that Americans like Fonda and former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark were allowed to visit and befriend an enemy that was brutalizing our POWs.

One could make a case that our constant exposure to anti-US propaganda while under such a stressful environment constituted an attempt at brainwashing. Propaganda is likely to have its greatest effect when associated with brutal treatment, isolation, and uncertainty. In the camps we were always referred to as criminals and often reminded over the speaker that our future depended on our attitude. Those who "repented for their crimes" would be treated humanely; others would be dealt with severely. Some interrogators would try to influence us by saying: "your friends have already helped us, you are being foolish not to cooperate." Of course we did not believe them. In fact, most of the time our communication system kept us well informed on what everyone was or was not doing. Considering the tremendous stress factors of being in an enemy prison camp where there was injury, disease, and torture, one would expect a high incidence of "attitude adjustment." Fortunately there were very few who changed their minds about the war during their

captivity. We stuck together and kept each other pumped up with the rightness of our cause. Our faith in our country and our way of life was too strong to allow our values to be changed by an enemy that displayed few values worthy of emulation.

Over the years, we had occasional attitude checks with the officers in charge of the camps. They usually gave a political lecture and then asked questions to see how we felt about the war. One cold and rainy day in 1969, I was called out of my room at the Son Tay prison camp. First the interrogator gave a typical lecture, during which I stared constantly at his left earlobe. (These tactics seemed to make my host a little uncomfortable.) After a long harangue, he asked what I thought of President Johnson. My reply was "I think he is a good man." He then asked what mistakes President Johnson had made. I responded by saying that I could not think of any. I knew that all I had to do was name one mistake and he would order me to write it down. I would, of course, refuse; he would then invoke the camp regulations (appendix B) to punish me for not "following the instructions of those in charge." This time I was sent to my room to "consider my bad attitude." The important thing is not to let the interrogator get you off balance by obtaining your agreement with him on minor points. Once you start down the path of cooperation, it becomes more and more difficult to draw the line and stay on your side. You must have the courage to say no, even though that answer may bring reprisal.

Courage in Resistance

The personal courage demonstrated by many POWs while resisting stands as a landmark in the history of the American fighting man. Many of their heroic stories are detailed in the books shown in the attached list of references. From reading these books and from my first-hand observations, I have drawn some conclusions as to what motivates a person to resist in the face of brutality. There is an old saying: "It is not the dog in the fight but the fight in the dog that counts." There is a lot of truth in this expression. Courage in resistance is a function of personality and character make-up--not size, social level, or any other external grouping. Those who resisted best were extremely competitive individuals--they did not like to lose or give up. They possessed self-confidence and upheld the virtues of dignity and honor. They were men of strong faith: faith in themselves, in their country, and in their God. These characteristics are usually identified with natural leaders. We were fortunate in North Vietnam. We had many such leaders.

Leadership in Resistance

Lieutenant Colonel Robbie Risner (Brigadier General, USAF Retired) had a long history as a natural leader. An ACE in the Korean War, he had earned a reputation in his military career as a great officer and one of America's top fighter pilots. His picture appeared on the cover of Time magazine in April 1965 and he was featured in their article on the professionalism of US combatants in Vietnam. Four months later he was the senior ranking officer (SRO) of the POWs in North

Vietnam. Colonel Risner took on that responsibility with the same aggressiveness that he had displayed in the air. He made camp policy and gave direction (covertly) just as though he were commanding his old fighter squadron. In late 1965 the first of the big purges started. Colonel Risner's guidance on resistance was discovered and he was moved out of camp. For the next 7½ years, he would pay an incredible price for his role as a leader in the camps. Commander Jeremiah Denton, the next senior man at the Zoo camp took over and continued the same policies that Colonel Risner had established. Like Colonel Risner and so many of the other leaders to follow, he would suffer extensively for his courage in command. Another great leader in the early years was Commander James Bond Stockdale (Vice Admiral, USN Retired). He was tough, smart, and had a profound influence on the men of the Hanoi Hilton.

After the Son Tay raid in the Fall of 1970, all those captured in North Vietnam were moved into the Hilton complex--most into one compound we called Camp Unity. Here Colonel John Peter Flynn, the SRO for the later years of the war, organized the POWs into the 4th Allied W Wing. His guidance and policies brought together the best of corporate wisdom and experience gained over the years. The camp policies, code named PLUMs (appendix C), were a landmark expansion on the Code of Conduct. They served the POWs extremely well both in captivity and after release. I believe they will serve the needs of our fighting men for many years in the future.

The list of leaders could go on, for there was never a reluctance to step forward and assume command. Whether it was two men in a room or

300 in a camp, there was always a senior man to set policy and guide resistance.

Military Organization in Resistance

Having a strong military organization is essential to success in a POW environment. The senior man must always take charge. He establishes standards, leads by example, and makes it known that each person will be held accountable for his actions.

There are many very tough decisions in a POW camp. People's lives sometimes depend on these decisions. The decisionmaker needs the authority and the loyalty we afford to command. The discipline of a military man following his leaders is a tremendous asset to the POW environment.

Command leadership greatly increases the POW's unity of effort and creates the feeling of security that comes from belonging to a group. This sense of belonging provides an important psychological boost at a time when it is most needed. Being organized promotes an attitude of "us against them," which is a strong motivator to resist the enemy. Americans typically want to be part of the team, and if you are on the team, you will go to great lengths not to let your teammates down.

The need for military organization in a POW camp is obvious. Its benefits to resistance and survival in North Vietnam are described in every chapter of this paper.

Communication: The Sinew of Resistance and Survival

No organization can function without communication. And nowhere is this more true than in a POW camp. Unfortunately, our enemy knew this also and went to great efforts to prevent communications between rooms and buildings within the camp. Guards patrolled the hallways eagerly trying to catch an American trying to communicate with another cell. In spite of a heavy penalty for those who were caught, the word always seemed to get through.

Immediately after capture most POWs were isolated for a period of time. The North Vietnamese wanted to play upon that initial feeling of uncertainty about the future that plagues every hostage or POW. The greatest fear of every POW was not that he would die, but that no one would know he existed. If one were channelled off into an archipelago of unknown camps, away from other Americans, his fate would be unknown. There would be no way of making an accounting for such an individual when the war ended. It was thus a great relief for the POW when he was able to pass that first message--his name, type of aircraft, and shoot-down date--and know that he was "in the system." We all had faith that as long as another American knew we were alive, some day, somehow, someone would get us out.

Communication with new shootdowns was high priority for other reasons also. The old heads could pass to them a short briefing on what was happening in the camp, what type of treatment to expect, how others had resisted, who the SRO was, and what his policies were. The idea was to get the new guy up to speed in order to remove some of his fears of

the unknown. We wanted to make him feel part of the group and to keep our formation tight as we headed toward our goal--return with honor.

The communication network (comm net) was the glue that held us together over the years. Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale, the senior Naval officer in North Vietnam, put it this way: "Leadership and communication were the blood and sinew of survival and resistance."

(14:18) The comm net provided the leaders with a way to reach out to the men. Encouraging messages were sent to those resisting coercion. When men were "broken" by interrogators, the comm net was used to pass on a "keep your chin up--we're proud of you." Only a person who has felt the loss of dignity that comes from being "broken" against his will can know the true value of an understanding word from the boss. Time and again the comm net served to lift the spirits of those who were down and help them bounce back for the next battle.

Our communications also enabled the leaders to retrieve someone who had gone astray. In one case, a man who had voluntarily made anti-war propaganda was moved to an isolated part of the camp. At great risk one of our communicators contacted this man and gave him a personal message from the commander. In essence, the message told the man to shape up and keep faith with his country and fellow men. The commander also let it be known that the individual would be accepted back into the fold if he turned from his old ways. Because of that message, this lost sheep was rescued and served admirably during the rest of his stay in North Vietnam. (14:561)

There were several other indirect but important benefits to our camp communications. Generally the more access the men had to communi-

cations, the better their morale. Messages about every conceivable subject were taped, flashed, coughed, and swept from room to room and across the camp. Men would risk torture just to find out the answer to the most inane of questions.

I remember asking and answering literally hundreds of questions to satisfy the needs of my own or someone else's latest mental project. These projects varied from mathematical equations to the cost of raising corn and hogs in Kansas (a physics major from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and a farmer from Kansas lived next door). Answers to such questions served as fuel to keep the mental fires burning.

When you have nothing to do but sit in a cell all day, keeping one's mind busy becomes high priority. To borrow from an old saying, "busy minds are happy minds." In a POW environment good morale may mean the difference between survival and death. What passed through the comm net as one man's trivia could be the spark that keeps his friend hanging on in hopes of a better day.

Keeping "busy hands" was also important in helping time pass for the POW. Maybe we were fortunate that for most of the early years our comm net relied on the tedious tap code. Morse code did not lend itself well to tapping through a wall because there was no way to make a short and long tap. In the summer of 1965 two men worked out a tap code that could be used to send messages through the 16-inch prison walls (code shown at appendix D). Using the tap code was a slow process but in the long hours of inactivity, there was nothing better to do. For many, preoccupation with communications was a blessing in disguise, for it kept them busy and stimulated their thoughts with new inputs each day.

Communicating was a way of life. It was one of the few ways we could gain a victory over the enemy. To make contact and get a message through brought the satisfaction of succeeding in a great challenge-- like pulling off a raid deep into enemy territory. For years the enemy had worked constantly to destroy the POW's self-confidence. Our communication's successes not only supported our organization, but also gave us a sense of accomplishment and pride. Pride gave us impetus to resist and survive the ordeal of years in prison.

CHAPTER III

SURVIVAL

A Sound Body

Americans are fortunate to live in a country which offers the finest food and medical care in the world. We have a tendency to overeat, consult a doctor for even minor illnesses, and take much more medicine than we really need. In our rush for instant relief, we overlook the natural healing powers of our body. These were the concessions I reached during my POW experience. I hope that the discussion which follows will convince you that the human body is an amazing organism which has incredible ability to survive.

Many of the POWs in North Vietnam suffered serious injuries because they had to eject from their aircraft under less than desirable conditions. High speed bailouts, for example, resulted in several men having multiple bone breaks. Captain Jon A. Reynolds arrived in Hanoi with both arms broken just below the shoulders. He also suffered a broken jaw and had a badly wrenched right leg and was unable to walk. (14:138) Despite miserable living conditions and a meager diet of pumpkin or cabbage soup and rice, his body healed itself. Captain Reynolds' story of recovery and rehabilitation was impressive to me, especially when I watched him do push-ups in sets of fifty.

Many POWs had severe infections due to lack of medical treatment for open wounds. The poor sanitary conditions associated with the early capture period and other periodic deprivations increased the likelihood of infections for even small cuts and abrasions. One man had an infec-

tion associated with a shrapnel wound which drained pus for several years. Although he did have some permanent impairment from the shrapnel, he survived and continues on active flying status as of this writing. A number of men in the camp contracted hepatitis in 1971. They were given special food consisting of powdered milk and extra protein foods, but they received no special medical treatment. They were told to rest and avoid exercise for three months. These precautions seemed to work very well as all the men completely recovered with no apparent ill-effects. For the vast majority of the men, serious diseases were not that frequent, and surprisingly few died during captivity.

Probably the thing that contributed the most to our good record of health was purified water and food. The camp authorities made sure that our drinking water was boiled. Drinking hot water in the summer time was definitely not my cup of tea, but I never complained because I knew it was safe. We were also fortunate that our food was always cooked. The normal fare consisted of six months of pumpkin soup, four months of cabbage soup, and about two months of turnip green soup. Sometimes there was a side dish consisting of sautéed pumpkin and pig fat, or if we were lucky, a serving of bean curd or fish powder. The meal was usually accompanied by rice or bread.

The cooking seemed to kill all the germs that were associated with the various critters and extraneous objects found in the food. The critters seemed to come and go in seasons as did the diet. In the spring tiny white worms, too numerous to pick out, might be floating in our soup. One August I counted forty-four weevils in one cubic inch of

bread. Those who have never really been hungry may not understand how quickly the psychological barriers which define edibility fall by the wayside. Within a short time after my capture, I could eat everything in my food that looked like it had been cooked, without regard to genus species and origins. Although these habits may be somewhat shocking to you, I want to make a point. Food has historically been scarce in POW camps. However, your survival is directly related to your body's ability to repair itself and fight disease. You cannot afford the luxury of being picky with your food. If it is reasonably clean, eat it.

Although the lack of food caused most POWs in Hanoi to look gaunt and skinny, we found it beneficial to carry on some sort of exercise. In the early years when the soup was so thin, walking was about all many had the strength to do. As the diet increased, most of the men broadened their exercise program. Exercise helps the body function efficiently, increases your oxygen-carrying capacity, and increases your resistance to illness. Physical exercise helped relieve the stress of POW life, and as a daily activity, helped to pass the time.

A Sound Mind

The psychological shock of being captured and imprisoned by a hostile force is severe but manageable. The body's natural survival instincts and your previous training will play a big part in helping you cope with the events of the first few days of capture. I found that in spite of the dangers, uncertainties and fears of my early POW days, I was able to function in a logical manner. Throughout my captivity, I observed that the POWs were able to serve effectively while enduring far more stress than we would normally expect.

The interesting thing about stress is that your threshold of tolerance increases with increased exposure to stress. This is one explanation why the astronauts seem so calm under what would be very stressful conditions for an uninitiated space passenger. The beauty of this principle is that for a good portion of our years in Hanoi, we lived a rather normal life. By that I mean we adjusted so well to our dreary existence that it became our way of life, just as someone on the outside adjusts to a new job or a new residence. We found that no matter what your situation, life has to go on. Having a good sense of humor and being able to laugh at your situation makes it even easier. Like those on the outside, the POW needs productive activities, goals, and the satisfactions that come from achievement.

The entire story of the mental triumphs of the Hanoi POWs would literally fill volumes. One of my roommates authored a beautiful and very philosophical epic poem that was over 400 hundred lines long--all with no pencil and paper of course. Memorizing Kipling's "Ballad of the East and West" was a typical weekend chore for many of us. Building homes, playing old golf courses, and recalling the name of practically everyone we had ever known were typical mind games we played.

When we were consolidated in large rooms of around 50 men in 1970, we had a field day sharing our talents and knowledge. My SRO appointed an education officer and told him to come up with an education program. Two weeks later, we were having classes in French, Spanish, German, history, art, math, and stereo electronics. One of the men would tell a movie or novel almost every evening, and we had Toastmasters two nights a week. We had no books; we had a few vocabulary

lists written on rough brown paper (our toilet paper) with ink made of ashes and brick dust. Our artists and mathematicians used a piece of brick for chalk and did their homework on the concrete slab we used for a bed. There were times I was so busy I did not even have time for a card game. The POWs in North Vietnam were ambitious; we hated the thought of a day being wasted. Our mental activities not only kept us busy but gave us the satisfaction of achievement.

A Strong Faith

The ability of the POW to resist and survive is dependent on his will to overcome his situation. What sustains this will and drives a person to endure severe leadership and deprivation? I believe the answer centers on a person's outlook toward the future. If a POW has faith in himself, he expects things to work out. A POW also needs faith in his country that he will not be forgotten and that some day his honorable release will be assured. Finally, I believe he needs faith in God. Most of the men in North Vietnam realized the importance of a relationship with the Supreme Being. Our religious faith gave us a better understanding of the purpose of life; it also helped us get along together and, thus, strengthened our unity. Our total faith gave us both a peace of mind to accept our situation and a spark of hope that kept the will to live beating strong in our breast.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The first American POWs of the Vietnam War were captured in 1964 and most were captured before 1969. The negotiated settlement and release came in 1973; for most of the POWs it was a very long war. The treatment statistics gathered by General John P. Flynn, commander of the 4th Allied W Wing, are frightening. Ninety-five percent of the POWs were tortured, 40 percent spent more than 6 months in solitary confinement (solo), 20 percent spent over 1 year in solo, 10 percent spent more than 2 years in solo and some were alone for over 4 years.

(13:D-12) Yet, these men came home as proud Americans eager to carry on and contribute to society.

These were not supermen; they were not even handpicked for their special assignment. They were a random selection who fell into the hands of the enemy. There were a number of factors which enabled them to resist and survive through the years. They had personal courage, strong leadership, a military organization, and communications to bind them together in a common effort.

The survival lessons learned from the Vietnam experience should be encouraging for future POWs. Our minds and bodies are far more malleable than we normally expect. As long as there is a strong faith and a will to live, the POW can endure most anything.

Will you ever become a POW? No one knows the answer to that question; but if history repeats itself, some day other Americans will again suffer the hardships of POW life. If it happens to you, remember

your heritage. Knowing about the experiences of other POWs will help you to resist, survive, and return with honor.

APPENDIX A

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES

I

I AM AN AMERICAN FIGHTING MAN. I SERVE IN THE FORCES WHICH GUARD MY COUNTRY AND OUR WAY OF LIFE. I AM PREPARED TO GIVE MY LIFE IN THEIR DEFENSE.

A member of the Armed Forces is always a fighting man. As such, it is his duty to oppose the enemies of the United States regardless of the circumstances in which he may find himself, whether in active participation in combat, or as a prisoner of war.

II

I WILL NEVER SURRENDER OF MY OWN FREE WILL. IF IN COMMAND I WILL NEVER SURRENDER MY MEN WHILE THEY STILL HAVE THE MEANS TO RESIST.

As an individual, a member of the Armed Forces may never voluntarily surrender himself. When isolated and he can no longer inflict casualties on the enemy, it is his duty to evade capture and rejoin the nearest friendly forces.

The responsibility and authority of a commander never extends to the surrender of his command to the enemy while it has power to resist or evade. When isolated, cut off, or surrounded, a unit must continue to fight until relieved, or able to rejoin friendly forces, by breaking out or by evading the enemy.

III

IF I AM CAPTURED I WILL CONTINUE TO RESIST BY ALL MEANS AVAILABLE. I WILL MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ESCAPE AND AID OTHERS TO ESCAPE. I WILL ACCEPT NEITHER PAROLE NOR SPECIAL FAVORS FROM THE ENEMY.

The duty of a member of the Armed Forces to continue resistance by all means at his disposal is not lessened by the misfortune of capture. Article 82 of the Geneva Convention pertains and must be explained. He will escape if able to do so, and will assist others to escape. Parole agreements are promises given the captor by a prisoner of war upon his faith and honor, to fulfill stated conditions, such as not to bear arms or not to escape, in consideration of special privileges, usually release from captivity or a lessened restraint. He will never sign or enter into a parole agreement.

IV

IF I BECOME A PRISONER OF WAR, I WILL KEEP FAITH WITH MY FELLOW PRISONERS. I WILL GIVE NO INFORMATION OR TAKE PART IN ANY ACTION WHICH MIGHT BE HARMFUL TO MY COMRADES. IF I AM SENIOR, I WILL TAKE COMMAND. IF NOT I WILL OBEY THE LAWFUL ORDERS OF THOSE APPOINTED OVER ME AND WILL BACK THEM UP IN EVERY WAY.

Informing or any other action to the detriment of a fellow prisoner is despicable and is expressly forbidden. Prisoners of war must avoid helping the enemy identify fellow prisoners who may have knowledge of particular value to the enemy, and may therefore be made to suffer coercive interrogation.

Strong leadership is essential to discipline. Without discipline, camp organization, resistance, and even survival may be impossible. Personal hygiene, camp sanitation, and care of sick and wounded are imperative. Officers and noncommissioned officers of the United

States will continue to carry out their responsibilities and exercise their authority subsequent to capture. The senior line officer or noncommissioned officer within the prisoner of war camp or group of prisoners will assume command according to rank (or precedence) without regard to Service. This responsibility and accountability may not be evaded. If the senior officer or noncommissioned officer is incapacitated or unable to act for any reason, command will be assumed by the next senior. If the foregoing organization cannot be effected, an organization of elected representatives, as provided for in Articles 79-81 Geneva Convention Relative to Treatment of Prisoners of War, or a covert organization, or both, will be formed.

V

WHEN QUESTIONED, SHOULD I BECOME A PRISONER OF WAR, I AM BOUND TO GIVE ONLY NAME, RANK, SERVICE NUMBER, AND DATE OF BIRTH. I WILL EVADE ANSWERING FURTHER QUESTIONS TO THE UTMOST OF MY ABILITY. I WILL MAKE NO ORAL OR WRITTEN STATEMENTS DISLOYAL TO MY COUNTRY AND ITS ALLIES OR HARMFUL TO THEIR CAUSE.

When questioned, a prisoner of war is required by the Geneva Convention and permitted by this Code to disclose his name, rank, service number, and date of birth. A prisoner of war may also communicate with the enemy regarding his individual health or welfare as a prisoner of war and, when appropriate, on routine matters of camp administration. Oral or written confessions true or false, questionnaires, personal history statements, propaganda recordings and broadcasts, appeals to other prisoners of war, signatures to peace or surrender appeals, self-criticisms or any other oral or written communication on behalf of the enemy or critical or harmful

to the United States, its allies, the Armed Forces or other prisoners are forbidden.

It is a violation of the Geneva Convention to place a prisoner of war under physical or mental torture or any other form of coercion to secure from him information of any kind. If, however, a prisoner is subjected to such treatment, he will endeavor to avoid by every means the disclosure of any information, or the making of any statement or the performance of any action harmful to the interests of the United States or its allies or which will provide aid or comfort to the enemy.

Under Communist Bloc reservations to the Geneva Convention, the signing of a confession or the making of a statement by a prisoner is likely to be used to convict him as a war criminal under the laws of his captors. This conviction has the effect of removing him from the prisoner of war status and according to this Communist Bloc device denying him any protection under terms of the Geneva Convention and repatriation until a prison sentence is served.

VI

I WILL NEVER FORGET THAT I AM AN AMERICAN FIGHTING MAN, RESPONSIBLE FOR MY ACTIONS, AND DEDICATED TO THE PRINCIPLES WHICH MADE MY COUNTRY FREE. I WILL TRUST IN MY GOD AND IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

The provisions of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, whenever appropriate, continue to apply to members of the Armed Forces while prisoners of war. Upon repatriation, the conduct of prisoners will be examined as to the circumstances of capture and through the period of detention with due regard for the rights of the individual

and consideration for the conditions of captivity. A member of the Armed Forces who becomes a prisoner of war has a continuing obligation to remain loyal to his country, his Service, and his unit. The life of a prisoner of war is hard. He must never give up hope. He must resist enemy indoctrination. Prisoners of war who stand firm and united against the enemy will aid one another in surviving this ordeal.

APPENDIX B
CAMP REGULATIONS

February 1967

In accordance with the prevailing situation in the camp and following the recent educational program of the criminals about the policy toward them and based on:

1. The policy toward the American criminals already issued.
2. The provision of detaining the blackest criminals in the DRVN.
3. The inspection and impletation [sic] of the camp regulations by the criminals in the past.

4. In order to insure the proper execution of the regulations, the camp commander has decided to issue the following new regulations which have been modified and aumented [sic] to reflect the new conditions. From now on the criminals must strictly follow and abide by the following provisions:

a. The criminals are under an obligation to give full and clear written or oral answers to all questions raised by the camp authorities. All attempts and tricks intended to evade answering further questions and acts directed to opposition by refusing to answer any questions will be considered as manifestations of obstinacy and antagonism which deserves strict punishment.

b. The criminals must absolutely abide by and seriously obey all orders and instructions from the Vietnamese officers and guards in the camp.

c. The criminals must demonstrate a cautious and polite attitude [toward] the officers and guards in the camp and must render greetings when met by them in a manner already determined by the camp authorities. When the Vietnamese officers and guards come to the rooms for inspection or when they are required by the camp officer to come to the office room, the criminal must carefully and neatly put on their clothes, stand attention, bow a greeting, and await further orders. They may sit down only when permission is granted.

d. The criminal must maintain silence in the detention rooms and not make any loud noises which can be heard outside. All schemes and attempts to gain information and achieve communication which [sic] the criminals living next door by intentionally talking loudly, tapping the walls, or by other means will be strictly punished.

e. If any criminal desires to ask a question, he is allowed to say softly only the words "Boa Cao." The guard will report this to the officer in charge.

f. The criminals are not allowed to bring into and keep in their rooms anything that has not been so approved by the camp authorities.

g. The criminals must keep their rooms clean and must take care of everything given to them by the camp authorities.

h. The criminals must go to bed and arise in accordance with the orders signalled by the gong.

i. During alerts the criminals must take shelter without delay. If no foxhole is available, they must go under their beds and lay close to the wall.

j. When a criminal gets sick, he must report it to the guard who will notify the medical personnel. The medical personnel will come to see the sick and give him medicine or send him to the hospital if necessary.

k. When allowed outside his room for any reason, each criminal is expected to walk only in the areas as limited by the guard in charge and seriously follow all his instructions.

l. Any obstinacy or opposition, violation of the preceding provisions, or any scheme or attempt to get out of the detention camp without permission are all punishable. On the other hand, any criminal who strictly obeys the camp regulations and shows his true submission and repentance by his practical acts will be allowed to enjoy the humane treatment he deserves.

m. Anyone so imbued with a sense of preventing violations and who reveals the identity of those who attempt to act in violation of the foregoing provisions will be properly rewarded. However, if and [sic] criminal is aware of any violation and deliberately tried to cover it up, he will be strictly punished when this is discovered.

n. In order to assure the proper execution of the regulations, all the criminals in any detention room must be held responsible for any and all violations of the regulations for any and all violations of the regulations committed in their room.

Signed
The Camp Commander
15 February 1969

APPENDIX C

FOURTH ALLIED POW WING POLICIES ("PLUMS")

WING POLICY #1--Command Authority

a. Any PW who denies or fails to carry out the Code of Conduct, Military Law, or Wing Policies may be relieved of all military authority. Emotional instability so serious as to impair judgment for a prolonged period may be cause for relief.

B. Only the Wing CO (WCO), Acting WCO, or Senior Ranking Officer (SRO) of detached units have authority to relieve or reinstate. This action must be based upon current performance and not on the past or hearsay. It is neither American nor Christian to nag a repentant sinner to the grave.

C. The SRO of detached units will assume command unless previously relieved. If he fails to do so or becomes eligible for relief under Paragraph A above, the next senior officer will assume command. This action must be based upon real evidence and action taken only after soul-searching judgment.

D. SRO of detached unit may revise Wing Policies as necessary to meet current conditions provided the change conforms to the Code of Conduct.

WING POLICY #2--Objectives

Part I.

The considerable improvements we have noted have been due primarily to external sources and to nothing we have done ourselves. We do not want to take a step backwards but we do want to oppose those things that are wrong. Be firm but reasonable.

Part II. Things that are wrong.

- A. Inhumane treatment such as isolation, stocks, etc.
- B. Insufficient opportunity to air legitimate grievances to the camp authorities.
- C. Interference with our letters and packages.

PART III. Things that we want.

- A. POW status.
- B. SROs to meet with camp authorities to help administer the camp.
- C. More outside time; sports such as volleyball.
- D. Educational materials.
- E. More and better food.

PART IV. How to get the things we want.

- A. Do not react to petty annoyances.
- B. Firmly oppose those things that are wrong.
- C. Work with camp authorities for improved welfare of all.

WING POLICY #3--PW Conduct

- A. Main points of the Code of Conduct.
 - 1. Do not condemn, deny, or say anything detrimental about the United States or its Allies or their cause.
 - 2. Do not accept special favors, including parole.
- B. Resistance and Tactics.
 - 1. Take torture to resist the following: writing propaganda; making tapes; bowing, making public appearances; writing or signing anything involving crimes or trials including pleas; giving military information; giving Wing secrets such as organization, internal communication, etc.

2. The objective is to give the enemy nothing. In any case minimize the enemy net gain by the use of moral courage, physical strength, trickery, and cover stories involving only oneself and pre-briefed cohorts.

3. It may be prudent to limit the taking of physical torture to the point short of the loss of mental skills. However, this point should not be short of significant pain nor reached solely through self-induced punishment such as sitting on stool, kneeling, etc.

4. If you take hard knocks, roll with the punches and bounce back to win the next round.

C. Writing statements except as follows:

1. For urgent reasons of health.

2. To minimize the net gain to the enemy. A PW who writes a statement for either reason above must justify his actions ASAP to WCO in a Conduct Exception Report (CER). SROs may write piecemeal administrative info providing it benefits the Wing and an oral presentation is not feasible. In any case writing under the above exceptions must not give the enemy propaganda.

D. Equal Treatment.

1. Accept and use improvement items within the Reasonable Time Frame (RTF) set by WCO.

2. Turn in items that have not spread to the majority during the RTF.

3. Nullify the enemy attempts to use improvement items for propaganda by turning them in if necessary.

WING POLICY #4--Resistance Conditions (RESCONS)

The following RESCONS are established:

RESCON One--Sing.

This is a planned disobedience of the V restriction against making noise. It is to be used to protest grievous wrongs. Past experience has shown that the V may react with anti-riot action and extreme caution should be used in its execution.

A. Sing the National Anthem.

This will be initiated by a message from WCO or by the WCO living group singing the Notre Dame Fight Song.

B. Singing the Star Spangled Banner and songs of your choice repeating the Star Spangled Banner for two days or until the SRO expects the threat of anti-riot action. This will be initiated by message or by singing Roll Out the Barrel from WCO living group.

RESCON Two--Squat.

This is a planned diet for one to two weeks. Turn back one-half your food in a manner that is clearly visible to the V and ensure they know why you are doing it. The sick and wounded are excluded from the diet. Go outside only for medical treatment, interrogations, or an SRO assigned task.

RESCON Three--Soldier.

Conduct all outside activities in military formations. Give impression of threats of higher escalation. Use variety and imagination in its execution.

RESCON Four--Stir.

Lessen your cooperation with the V and ensure they know why you are doing it. Maintain strict order and discipline in this and all other escalations. Avoid direct confrontations with the V that would result in the man being removed from the room.

RESCON Five--Stance (our normal RESCON).

Conduct yourselves as officers and gentlemen. Maintain strict order and discipline. Avoid self-degradation and exploitation. Show composure and reserved civility toward the V. Maintain a low order-low risk, erosive type resistance.

REMARKS:

Only the WCO or DO can authorize RESCON One. SROs may escalate to four and return to one without prior permission. RESCONS are not cumulative.

WING POLICY #5--Release.

Objective--Honorable release for all. Honorable release may be all together or incremental or through a legitimate third party or expulsion. Prefer sick and wounded first; enlisted, civilians, and officers in order of capture. WCO and VCO will go last. Only WCO can approve release. No PW can negotiate own release. If at anytime during the release sequence it becomes evident that the release would meet with US Government disapproval, the release will be refused and resisted.

Foresee three situations likely.

Sit One: Vietnamese continue early release of few for propaganda. This violates Code of Conduct. Action: Refuse and resist.

Sit Two: Vietnamese withhold details or refuse to allow WCO approval.

Action: Force Vietnamese to expel you.

A. Make strong effort to see WCO.

B. State I want to go home in my turn after sick and wounded without fancy clothes and that the Code of Conduct requires me to resist propaganda. Caution: Be firm or Vietnamese may mark you for propaganda.

C. Thereafter go in silence. Do not write, sign, or say anything except as approved by US Government representative. Do nothing to hamper honorable release of others. OK to sign for personal effects.

D. Resist association with known civilian propaganda groups or participation in propaganda activities. Normal candid news photography is not propaganda. Work through your senior officer in accordance with Wing Policy #1.

Sit Three: Vietnamese publicize formal agreement between governments.

Action: Same as Sit Two except SRO in communication or SRO of detachment can take any common sense action within the Code of Conduct to effect a smooth release.

WING POLICY #6--Post Release Behavior Standards.

A. Our attitude at time of release should reflect our pride to our country during this most difficult period.

B. A man's most prized possession is his reputation. Do not make any derogatory remarks concerning the behavior of other PWs except before an official inquiry and then stick to the facts.

C. This principle of military and Christian behavior applies here while we are still PWs.

WING POLICY #7--Open Door Policy.

A. Any PW may submit to the WCO or detachment SRO through normal comm channels:

1. Request for redress of grievances.
2. Request for relief from any Wing Policy or portion thereof for personal reasons.
3. Suggestions and Recommendations. These may be endorsed as appropriate up through channels. Flag link available if matter is personal. If comm is cut, the senior SRO in comm will assume command and report the action taken when comm is restored.

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APPENDIX D
THE TAP CODE

Morse code does not lend itself well to tapping through walls because it requires two distinctly different sounds. In the summer of 1965 two men worked out a tap code that was simple and could be used to send messages through the walls. They eliminated the letter K from the alphabet and used a C wherever a K was needed; the alphabet now contained 25 letters. By placing each letter in a box divided into 5 rows and 5 columns (thus producing 25 squares), each letter was assigned a characteristic identity. The box looked like this:

	1	2	3	4	5		
1	A	B	C	D	E		
2	F	G	H	I	J		
Count down, then right	3	L	M	N	O	P	H is down 2, over 3
	4	Q	R	S	T	U	
	5	V	W	X	Y	Z	

The letter A is represented by 1-1, transmitted by tap, pause, tap. H would be 2-3, transmitted by two taps, pause, three taps. In order to tap the word "Hi," one would issue: two taps, pause, three taps, two taps, pause, four taps.

The code was passed to everyone in the cell block. As these men were split up, they became the apostles of the communication system, passing the code wherever they went.

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