

A Civilian's Story

WXPost story filed POWs.
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'POWs Spied for Better Treatment'

Washington

Some of the eight ex-POWs charged by an officer with misconduct spied on other prisoners and occasionally donned North Vietnamese uniforms in order to receive favorable treatment, according to a U.S. civilian official who was a fellow captive.

The alleged collaborators, in turn, received extensive special privileges, including beer and liquor and high-protein foods, the ex-captive said.

Some of the accused POWs then asked their captors for permission to remain in North Vietnam after the war, or to be transported to a socialist or neutral country, according to the ex-captive.

Michael D. Bengé, an Agency for International Development adviser who was held in a prison camp near Hanoi called "The Plantation" from November, 1970, until March, 1973, disclosed his version of the conduct of the accused ex-POWs in an interview with the Washington Post and in an address at a high school in Gervais, Ore.

CHARGES

Air Force Colonel Theodore W. Guy, who was the senior officer at The Plantation, filed formal charges Tuesday against five Army and three Marine Corps enlisted men for court-martial offenses ranging from aiding the enemy to constructing model aircraft for the North Vietnamese to use in target practice.

The enlisted men have denied the charges, and some have accused Guy of attempting to demonstrate for self-serving purposes that there was a framework of military discipline in the camp when actually there was not.

One of the accused ex-POWs is prepared to file a \$1 million damage suit against Guy. Others said they are thinking of joining the civil suit.

The Marine Corps POWs accused by Guy are Sergeant Able L. Kavanaugh, of Denver; Staff Sergeant Alphonso Riate, of Santa Rosa, Calif., and Private Frederick L. Elbert, of Brentwood, N.Y., and Staff Sergeants Robert P. Chenoweth, of Portland, Ore.; James A. Daly Jr., of New York City; John Young, of Grayslake, Ill., and King D. Rayford, of Chicago, and Specialist 4 Michael P. Branch of Highland Heights, Ky.

CAPTIVES

Bengé said he was held captive with Guy and the eight accused enlisted men in two prison camps over a period of about four years.

Bengé said some of the accused "cooperated willingly to the point that it resulted in others being beaten, mistreated and placed in solitary confinement for long periods of time."

At least two of the group, Bengé said, openly declared that "they would do anything to get out one day sooner."

"Some went as far as taking North Vietnamese uniforms," he added.

TREATMENT

The special treatment accorded the cooperating prisoners, Bengé said, included allotments of Vietnamese beer, wine and liquor, candy, soft drinks, peanuts and popcorn. Some of these foods were particularly val-

uable to the prisoners because of their high-protein content, Bengé said.

The cooperating prisoners, Bengé charged, were allowed to write letters and receive mail from home, and were given "guided tours" of Hanoi.

"The epitome of North Vietnamese hypocrisy came when the (peace) agreements were signed and these guys were told they would have to go home," said Bengé.

A 37-year-old former Marine who speaks Vietnamese fluently, Bengé currently is on a speaking tour of the west, talking about his prison camp experiences and about atrocities against the Montagnard tribesmen in the highlands.

GROUP

Bengé said he first learned about the existence of a group of prisoners he called "the peace committee" about three months after arriving at The Plantation.

"I tried contacting them to tell them to shut their mouths because the North Vietnamese don't allow their own people to talk. I tried to talk in the courtyard, through our communications, and tried to write them letters. I was put in solitary confinement," Bengé said.

Later, Bengé said, he and other prisoners believed there were "eight spies" in the camp to report to the North Vietnamese on the activities of other prisoners.

Another Plantation prisoner, Specialist 6 John Sparks, of Chattanooga, Tenn., said he knew all eight men accused of misconduct,

but that he feels their actions were based upon disenchantment with the war rather than solely an attempt to get special treatment.

"It was at a time when there was a lot of bombing going on and some of the men disagreed with the way the war was being conducted," said Sparks. He said he believed the eight accused men wanted political asylum when the peace agreement was signed.

The plans to file a \$1 million lawsuit against Guy were announced by William J. Hagedorn, a Newport, Ky., lawyer retained by Branch. The suit will seek damages for defamation of Branch and his parents, Hagedorn said.

Branch told the Associated Press that during most of his four years and ten months of confinement, there was no chain of command or communications network at The Plantation.

"It was like a bazaar — chaos. Everybody was on his own. When the war was coming to an end — and this is my own opinion — Colonel Guy and the other officers started making a show of order," he said.

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