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Vietcong Release G.I. Held for 3 Years

By The Associated Press

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Oct. 8—A United States sergeant was released by the Vietcong today after more than two years' captivity. He walked barefoot for eight hours through jungles to safety and reported that he had seen other American prisoners during the two years.

S-Sgt. John C. Sexton Jr., 23 years old, of Warren, Mich., made his way to an allied base camp at Locninh, 70 miles north of Saigon.

Reporting that he had always been segregated from other Americans, he said he "kept seeing new faces all the time, never the same ones." He did not indicate how many other Americans he had seen.

The United States command said the sergeant was the 24th American released by the Vietcong and the first in 22 months. Nine others have been freed by the North Vietnamese and a handful have escaped.

'Generally Good Condition'

Although he was tired and his face was drawn, Sergeant Sexton was pronounced in generally good condition after an examination.

Officers said Sergeant Sexton had told them his captors had not explained why he was being freed, nor had they given him any "message to the American people," as they sometimes have in releasing prisoners.

He said he had constantly been shifted around during his captivity and was never allowed to approach other prisoners. He was wounded and captured in an ambush of his armored unit near Anloc, 15 miles south of Locninh, on Aug. 12, 1969.

He told officers a grenade had spread shrapnel through his right side. He said he had lost vision in his right eye and that his right elbow was shattered and immovable.

While he had no idea where he had been held, allied intelligence sources believed it was somewhere in Cambodia.

Officers said Sergeant Sexton appeared bitter and dejected when he walked into the Locninh base camp, 10 miles south of the Cambodian border.

They said he had hobbled through the jungle with a rough map drawn for him by the



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S. Sgt. John C. Sexton Jr.

Vietcong and a note in Vietnamese asking people to assist him in getting back "to the United States Embassy."

One American officer said to Sergeant Sexton: "You're back with the Americans. That should make you feel real good."

He replied, "Yes, but they went off and left me," in reference to his unit at the time of his capture. He was a member of Troop E, Second Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

The officers said the Americans apparently had been forced to pull back in the ambush and had left Sergeant Sexton behind. But the time the unit returned, they said, he had been captured.

Sergeant Sexton said he had always been on the move and had "walked and walked and walked" day and night, sometimes blindfolded. Occasionally, he said, he rode on oxcart.

"He has a very fine haircut," said one of the first Americans to see him at Locninh. "He was freshly shaved, real clean looking. He was wearing something similar to hospital pajamas, light bluish."

Well-Treated, He Says

At Locninh he was given orange soda and a bowl of soup and an officer reported: "He devoured the soup immediately."

Sergeant Sexton said he had been treated well by the Vietcong. He said he had been scheduled to be released on

Sept. 2 and again on Sept. 8 but each time it had been postponed. He was flown by helicopter to an Army hospital at Longvinh, 12 miles northeast of Saigon, where he was reported resting comfortably tonight.

Sergeant Sexton said he did not know by what route he was brought to the release point after a 10-day march. He recalled crossing several rivers but was unable to identify any landmarks.

From the hospital, Sergeant Sexton called his father in Warren. The Army had informed the father that his son was freed.

Laird Voices Happiness

WASHINGTON, Oct. 8 (AP)—Defense Secretary Malvin R. Laird, voicing happiness over Sergeant Sexton's release, said today: "We remain concerned about the hundreds of other of our military personnel held" in Southeast Asia.

The Pentagon lists 462 Americans captured—2 in China, 378 in North Vietnam, 79 in South Vietnam and 3 in Laos. In addition, 1,176 Americans are listed as missing in action.