

How POWs Live, By One of Them

Let us observe the nitty-gritty of a pro and con:

Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, home from Hanoi: "I've seen a lot of prisons in my life. These 10 men (POW's he was permitted to talk to) were unquestionably humanely treated, well treated. Their individual rooms were better and bigger than the rooms in essentially every prison I have ever visited anywhere."

Lt. Col. Norris M. Overly, USAF, one of the few POWs the North Vietnamese have ever released: "It was worse than any Nazi or North Korean prison. I was hit by the butt of a rifle during one long interrogation because I crossed my legs, which they regarded as a mark of disrespect. But the more subtle agony was living in an eight-by-eleven foot cell and left to rot."

Clark felt that the POWs he saw were in as good physical shape as he is.

Overly: "I was shot down on September 11, 1967, 60 miles north of the DMZ. Our choppers tried to get to me but were driven off by ground fire. I was captured by what amounted to 200 villagers. They tied me to a pole in a village square and for the next few days they took turns at beating me, kicking me, spitting and urinating on me. Then they turned me over to the military.

"The military roped me to a kind of cross, put me on a truck, and displayed me for a few days in each village on the way to Hanoi. They wet the ropes so that they would contract in the sun. The only time they would let me free was to tie me to a large can of gasoline and put me in an exposed place when they felt the American strafing planes were coming. I would be the first to go, they figured. It took seven weeks to get to Hanoi."

Overly lost 45 pounds during his imprisonment. He was released as a "token" POW in February, 1968, at which time he was listed as "Missing In Action," which is another way of saying that his captors had given no signal he was still alive.

It might be interesting to hear Mr. Clark and Col. Overly debate the merits and humanities of the North Vietnamese approach to the Geneva Convention.

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AUGUST IS THE TIME of dog days, and sure enough the month has reflected itself in its news stories:

Sarge Shriver says President Nixon had a chance to reach a negotiated peace with Hanoi, 'way back when. Had the whole thing right on his lap, and blew it.

Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance, trying to talk peace in Paris at the aforementioned alleged time, say Sarge is right. But it really wasn't something in black and white and in non-disappearing ink, they add. It was a "signal." Some North Vietnamese regiments had marched home from South Vietnam across the DMZ. A majority of the invading regiments remained.

Okay, so far? Well, Secretary of State Bill Rogers says Shriver's charge is bah, humbug. Henry Cabot Lodge, one-time ambassador to Saigon, says no such peace offer was made at the time Shriver pinpoints. John Mitchell growls and develops dandruff. George McGovern supports his running mate's tough charge and adds that Nixon's response to the gracious offer from Hanoi was a step-up in the bombing of the north. Somebody then remembers that the North wasn't being bombed at that particular period—October, 1968. Then somebody else recalls that the peace offer could not have been muffed by Nixon because Nixon wasn't President at the time. Johnson was.

Dog days.