

# Ex-POW Details Friendly Treatment by North Viets

United Press

## Los Angeles

American prisoners get along well with their North Vietnamese jailers—playing games, joking, swapping family anecdotes and gardening—according to a released POW.

The Los Angeles Times yesterday printed the first extensive interview with Navy Lieutenant (j.g.) Norris Charles, a full page of Charles' reminiscences of life in a North Vietnamese POW camp, as told to Steve Jaffe and copyrighted by Jaffe.

Charles and two other prisoners were released two months ago in a move Charles said "was just to show the American people that if the war is ended, the North Vietnamese will release all the POWs."

Charles said one of his first surprises came as he parachuted down after his plane was crippled by a missile, and he found his captors were not hostile.

### PLANE

"As they ran up to me, they were laughing. I could see no animosity on their faces. I think their apparent

happiness was a combination of jubilation and pride of conquest. They take pride in shooting you down, but they're not hostile really, even though we bomb their houses every day."

Charles described the POWs as well fed, getting three nourishing meals a day even on days when camp routine is disrupted by U.S. bombing raids.

"One of the most important things in the life of a POW" he said is that on six holidays — the American holidays of Christmas, Easter, July 4th and New Year's Day plus Vietnamese Tet (New Year's day) and North Vietnam's National Day — the prisoners are given large festive meals.

### MEAL

He arrived at his camp on New Year's day, he said, to a meal of "boiled eggs, a nice salad, duck and a whole bunch of other stuff. I couldn't believe it.

It was like something in the movies, but hardly what I expected in an enemy prison camp.

"My guard and I would talk all the time," even when he was in solitary confinement for his first 36 days, Charles said. "He would walk in and just talk. The guards are just as interested in the American peo-

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ple as we might be in them under different circumstances. We talked mostly about our families, our kids, they weren't interrogating, just passing the time . . . we used to make jokes with the guards. They never gave their names but we would make up names for them like 'Smiley' and 'Champ.'"

"There was one guard we thought was crazy but he was a good guy and watched over us well. In fact, he even shaved one prisoner who had a broken arm and couldn't shave himself . . .

"There was no animosity between prisoner and guard. The guards watching over us were very human and hu-

mane."

One guard ran for help when a flyer, whose arm was broken in his parachute jump, complained of pain, and brought a medic "who stayed up all night with him, sat by him with all the other guys in his room," Charles said.

Charles said that although he was questioned twice, there was never any attempt to force him to answer questions if he refused. "If they asked you something you thought was treasonable to answer, you would just say so and they would make you stand there. I'd heard different stories about how it might have been in the old days, but in the time I was

there, there was nothing done to me. I certainly experienced no torture."

Charles said the prisoners were given playing cards, chess sets, so much literature, including American books and clippings from periodicals that "I read more there than I had in college" and had a small plot where they could grow vegetables and raise chickens."

The guards laughed at the surprise shown by the prisoner charged with tending the chickens when he discovered the next morning that the birds had been included in the special dishes served him and the other prisoners to celebrate the North Vietnamese national holiday, Charles recounted.