

Advice, Caution From POWs of Previous Wars

By Kevin Leary

A crowd of 40 middle-aged men gathered for a quiet dinner at a North Beach restaurant yesterday and reflected on the returning American prisoners of the Vietnam war.

They were members of an organization called American Ex Prisoners of War, with a national membership of about 5000 representing POWs from World War I to Vietnam.

More than most Americans, these men understand what it means to have lived as a prisoner of the enemy and to have returned.

"Sometimes watching these guys come back home makes me so anxious that I can hardly work," said Barney Barnett, 52, of Pinole, who was captured on Guam by the Japanese on Dec. 11, 1941 — four days after Pearl Harbor.

Barnett, who was a POW for nearly four years, said, "the men who were in for a long time will never get over the experience, they'll live it over again, and they'll have bad dreams about it."

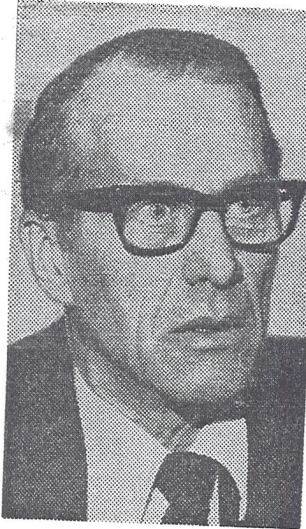
AILMENTS

Many of those dining at the Mabuhay Gardens still suffered from ailments contracted under the brutal conditions of prison camp life three decades ago.

The old POWs repeatedly suggested the young men returning from Vietnam prisons make sure they are in perfect health before they leave military hospitals.

"They should be cautious in the euphoria and happiness of their homecoming," advised David Levy, 55, of Martinez, who was 2½ years in a Japanese camp in Manchuria.

"There is such a feeling of well-being in coming home



BARNEY BARNETT
'Bad dreams'

they are not aware of medical problems that can occur later — sometimes years later, that's what happened in our group," Levy said.

WELCOME

The group also believes the returning POWs should be given much more public attention when they come home.

"I don't see this low-keyed reception," said Shaffe T. Courey of Pittsburg, past

commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart and a longtime prisoner of the Japanese.

"The confetti should be out, the country should be celebrating and they should have ticker-tape parades, then let them go into seclusion with their families," said Courey.

Courey and others among the group were concerned that some of the returning men would feel they did not have the support of the American people because of the publicity given to anti-war protesters.

"I'd like them to know that only a small percentage of people were involved in anti-war activities; most of the American people were backing them," said John Lay, 52, of Pittsburg, past national commander of the Ex POWs.