

6 Freed Prisoners Tell A Little of How It Was

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CLARK AIR BASE, the Philippines, Feb. 19—Six American war prisoners, freed yesterday in Hanoi, talked to newsmen here today about their thoughts in captivity, how they felt about being released, and their plans.

The men were prohibited from discussing their treatment by the North Vietnamese or any events before their release yesterday. Only "noncontroversial" questions were allowed and the prisoners' remarks were subject to censorship by military information officers who monitored each interview. The men were questioned separately, one reporter to each, on the agreement that the newsmen would pool their information.

Following is a summary of the interviews.

JAMES G. PIRIE, a 37-year-old Navy commander from Tuscaloosa, Ala., the senior officer released yesterday, said he remained in charge of the 19 men released with him. He continues to tell them what to wear, what to say and what to do.

"To a man, we're close knit. Any deviation will be a slip of the tongue or an emotional slip."

He lost no weight during his six years as a war prison-

er, and never had malaria. Like the other married men, he telephoned his wife and also his mother last night.

"My wife said she had millions of things to say but she couldn't think of anything."

JAY R. JENSEN, a 41-year-old Air Force major from Sandy, Utah, was released six years to the day after he was shot down. His wife divorced him three years ago. He became a grandfather in December.

"I feel that I have spent six years in hell and that I have been resurrected and I'm going to start a new life," he said.

He said the old prisoners were told by men shot down recently of hair and style changes, but they still came as a shock.

Asked about his feelings on the war, he said "We know there has been a lot of controversy, a lot of mixed emotions and feelings over the war and we plan on not making a decision on this." He added:

"Of course we were for the war to begin with and as far as we know we're still for the war, and until we have been proved otherwise, we're not going to change our minds. But we are going to look into the history of what's happened since we've been shot down very closely."

HERBERT B. RINGS DORF, a 33-year-old Air Force captain from Elba, Ala., who was captured in 1966, had a tooth pulled this morning that had been bothering him for two years.

Asked about changes in the United States while he was in captivity, he said: "We have received some indication that there have been broad social changes back home, but you have to live with society. I've sort of adopted a wait-and-see attitude on everything."

MICHAEL C. LANE, a 31-year-old Air Force captain from New Haven, and a bachelor, said he was already collecting girls' telephone numbers.

Asked about his emotions during his six years in prison, he said:

"My release was always just six months away. We always used that sight. We counted them also one day at a time. At no time did we despair."

Air Force captain EDWARD J. MECHENBIER, a 30-year-old from Dayton, Ohio, said the most "startling" thing he noticed in his first day at Clark Air Base after five years in captivity was "the lack of change."

Asked whether his imprisonment had been worth the suffering on behalf of the cause, he said, "I don't know."

Close relationships with other prisoners helped overcome a feeling of despair, but he said he sometimes felt that "whatever comes, tomorrow comes—I never suffered much real fear."

Asked how he would explain his years in prison to others, Captain Mechenbier said: "If you've never done it, then words can't express it. If you have, you don't need to have it described."

KEVIN J. McMANUS, a 30-year-old Air Force captain who was born in New York City, was shot down in the same plane with Captain Mechenbier on June 14, 1967.

On plans, he said he wanted to keep flying.

"My wife and I had one goal—to have 16 kids—after that it doesn't matter."