

See also this file 14 Feb 73.

# Vietcong Captive Tells of 7-Year Ordeal

NYTimes MAR 2 1973

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 1—Douglas K. Ramsey, a 38-year-old Foreign Service officer who spent seven years in Vietcong captivity, told today of forced marches, isolation, beri-beri, malaria, meals of monkey, dog and bear meat, crude cages, shackles, chains and the jungle burial of a fellow prisoner.

But Mr. Ramsey repeatedly emphasized during a two-hour meeting with a small group of newsmen today—the first since his release last month—that his handling, under the circumstances, “would not constitute gross mistreatment.”

He made an effort, he said, to judge each of his captors individually, and added that they “ranged from saintly to something out of Marquis de Sade.”

Mr. Ramsey, who is from Boulder City, Nev., seemed fit. One of the few visible signs of his imprisonment was a slight limp in his left leg—a result of a severe case of beri-beri in 1966, he said.

His description of prison life was facile and punctuated with easy humor, all the more remarkable, a State Department official said later, considering that he did not have one sustained conversation during the last five years of his captivity.

In all, Mr. Ramsey related, he spent six of his seven years in isolation—usually living in crude cages that did provide enough room to exercise.

He explained that three things kept him alive during the years that he was trundled from prison camp to prison camp in South Vietnam and Cambodia, while his captors tried to keep ahead of American and South Vietnamese military offensives.

Perhaps most important, Mr. Ramsey indicated, was that “I developed a compulsive neurosis, vis-à-vis exercise.” For a

Continued on Page 3, Column 1

time, he said, he would try to jog in place for seven miles.

A second aid was his ability “to overcome constant nausea,” he said, and to force himself to eat. He cited the case of a fellow prisoner, badly weakened from malnutrition and disease, who could not bring himself to eat his regurgitated food and thus grew even weaker.

Mr. Ramsey told how Major Cook refused to provide information during interrogations, frustrating an interrogator known to the men as Old Grandpa.



Douglas K. Ramsey as he was released last month.

“A third thing,” Mr. Ramsey said, “for which I can’t take credit, was the fact that after the third year, time began to move very rapidly.” He said that the “last three years passed more quickly than the first 10 months.”

To help pass the time, he explained he did mathematical puzzles and games in his head. He spent a great of time trying to devise mathematical formulas that would measure how much time slowed as a rocket approached the speed of light—a concept, he said, that was related to Einstein’s Theory of Relativity.

#### Mental Multiplication Helped

He also spent hours multiplying numbers in his head, he said, “and finally worked up to where I could multiply four digits by four digits.”

“I worked up to the point where I was ready to run out of my cell screaming,” he added with a smile—“but there was a lock on my door.”

His most critical period, he said came in 1967 in a Vietcong prison camp somewhere in the jungles west of Saigon. He contracted cerebral malaria in the mosquito-infested area and spent 60 hours in a coma.

“When I woke up,” Mr. Ramsey related matter-of-factly, “I found that every single superficial blood vessel in my head, arms and legs had swollen shut.” He was fortunate, he said, because the prison-camp doctor arrived “literally within 60 seconds after I went into convulsions.” His pulse rate dropped to 34, he said.

During the two-hour interview today Mr. Ramsey could—at best—only briefly describe the seven years of captivity, leaving many areas undiscussed.

For example, he did not get a chance to describe the physical characteristics of his jungle prisons, although he mentioned that one of his cells had a light-bulb in it. He also mentioned, almost in passing, that he had been moved by the Vietcong from one prison after things began “getting pretty hot” in the summer of 1967. He did not explain what “pretty hot” meant.

He did indicate that he was planning to write in detail about his experiences.

#### No Bitterness Evident

In general, Mr. Ramsey, who is fluent in Vietnamese, expressed no personal bitterness toward his captors, in contrast to the attitudes of many of the American pilots who returned last month from captivity in North Vietnam.

Thus, when asked about his living quarters while in captivity, he calmly replied, “I spent several years in cages which were too small for me to pace in.” But he quickly added, “I was never in one in which I couldn’t run in place.” He said he was always able to stand erect in his cells, a reference to his six-foot-three-inch height.

He told of being chained to a tree by his captors while making a shift in prison camps, but added that it was a step he could understand, given the circumstances.

Mr. Ramsey’s tone of understatement was occasionally offset by a slight hand tremble, but the only time that he allowed himself anger was while he was discussing the food arrangements during his imprisonment.

On occasion, he said, the Vietcong “did attempt to maintain the fiction that we were getting the same food as the prison guards were.” In fact, he said with some emotion, “the VC often got considerably more protein and vegetables than we did.”

He spoke with obvious bitterness about one time when guards were seen throwing peanuts to chickens—at a time when many American prisoners were suffering from beri-beri and desperately need the Vitamin B-1 in the peanuts.

Often, he continued, Vietcong prison guards would hoard or in other ways appropriate food meant for the prisoners, but such situations were sometimes rectified by direct complaints to prison camp officials.

“A lot of it depended on the camp commanders,” Mr. Ramsey said. “In seven years there, I ran into dogs and real jewels. Some people I would invite

today into my home for a drink; others I’d invite behind a woodshed and only one of us would return.”

#### Enjoyed Dog and Monkey

He spoke with obvious pleasure about the occasional meals of meat. “We ate both man’s best friend and his closest relative swinging through the trees,” he said, “and we enjoyed it.”

“The only meat I didn’t enjoy was from an old bear. That bear fat did what Ex-Lax couldn’t do.”

Mr. Ramsey readily talked about the many antiwar statements he had made to his captors. He seemed untroubled by the statements, noting that “there was not at any point any conscious revelation of anything which I considered to be of defense-related information.”

“Secondly,” he said, “I would never solicit desertion, tell somebody to drop a one-inch bolt in a reduction gear to disable a ship] or to perform any overt acts of opposition to the war.”

He continued that many of his antiwar statements subsequently became national policy, particularly those he made on the need to relax tension with China. “I found that the new Administration had made the sort of the policy changes that I urged” from prison, Mr. Ramsey said.

#### Admits Some Errors

He said that in many areas he had been very much mistaken in his criticism, but he added without apology that “my view was narrowed in the hermetically sealed world I lived in.”

Asked if he had made any statement under duress, Mr. Ramsey said, “I was told that all statements were voluntary and then reminded that I had received good treatment, including medicines and vitamins.” He added that he would leave it to others to judge whether that constituted duress, but clearly suggested that it did.

On this subject, he also said that there was “an indirect death threat which extended over many months—one that would be very, very difficult to believe.” He refused details on the ground that they could endanger the release of prisoners in the South.

A State Department official said later that the department planned to honor Mr. Ramsey publicly for “his strength and wisdom” while in prison. “Some of these episodes he’s low-keying,” the official said, noting that they showed “really incredible survival capability.”

#### Describes Another As Hero

If there was a hero in the prison camps, Mr. Ramsey suggested, it was Maj. Donald G. Cook, a marine who died in captivity on Dec. 8, 1967, according to the Vietcong.

“He wouldn’t give Grandpa the time of day,” Mr. Ramsey said of the major. “I think that they respected him for that.”

Major Cook also made an apparently successful prison break during 1966, Mr. Ramsey said, but returned to aid a col-

league who had caught his foot in the crotch of a tree. Because of that, he was recaptured and died—after struggling against malnutrition and beri-beri throughout much of 1967, when he and Mr. Ramsey were roommates.