

# Ex-POW Describes Seven

By John Saar

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Seven years in Vietnam jungle prisons where he went to the brink of death from malaria, saw other U.S. prisoners die and gladly ate rats, dogs and monkeys to survive were described by a former POW yesterday.

Douglas Ramsey a 38-year-old U.S. Foreign Service officer captured in 1966 and freed last month, also described at a State Department press conference conditions in which prisoners battled to survive against disease and dietary deficiency. He spoke of his internment — six years of it in solitary confinement — with calm objectivity and no apparent malice toward his former captors.

Of his guards, Ramsey said, "In seven years I met some dogs and I met some jewels. There were some I'd invite into my home now. There are others I'd invite behind the woodshed, and only one of us would return."

Although pale and stoop-shouldered and very thin—his double-knit slacks and black blazer hung loosely on him—Ramsey said he was in good health. He appeared somewhat nervous and his hands trembled.

On the day of his capture, Jan. 17, 1966, Ramsey recalled that as an official of the U.S. Agency for International Development he was making a rice drop to refugees from a village near Saigon in Haungia Province. He took the decision to make the run himself because his drivers were under suspicion for the theft of AID goods and were nervous about the area the run was in. "It was always my policy never to send them somewhere I wouldn't go myself," he said.

Ramsey was captured near Trunglap after an exchange of fire with a Vietcong ambush party.

"I was 90 per cent certain I was going to be greased on the spot for returning fire,"

he said, "but my captors were almost friendly."

At one point, however, they blindfolded Ramsey and told him to walk in front of them. "I was sure I was going to be executed," he recalled. "I asked to face them and take the blindfold off."

The trek to the first prison camp where he was to spend 10 months took about a week with stops, said Ramsey, including one at which he shared a festive Tet meal in a private home. At night, he was kept in leg irons and was shackled to a tree.

Ramsey described one of his captors as "a real friendly kid of 15" who asked him what the Americans were doing in Vietnam. Ramsey told him the most important motivation was to prevent a Chinese takeover. "He said to me, 'Ramsey recalled, 'If you are afraid of the Chinese, why don't you go and fight them instead of destroying our land?'"

In the Tayninh rear area of his first camp, Ramsey said the atmosphere chilled to an iceberg situation.

"Any attempts on my part to smooth things over were very much resented and the atmosphere was extremely hostile. I was not physically abused or beaten in the conventional sense, but there were definite threats to make an example of me."

At one point, he was told if he cried out again during a nightmare they could not guarantee he would not be shot, Ramsey said. Some of the threats Ramsey said, were occasioned by the be-

In the Tayninh rear area ~~lief that he was~~ "a high-level CIA agent with the blood of thousands of Vietnamese on my hands."

When he arrived in the first camp, there were three other American POWs there, among them Marine Corps Capt. Donald Cook, who "would not give them (the guards) the time of day."

Periodically crippled by

beri-beri and troubled by boils that limited him to two or three hours' sleep a night, Ramsey was held apart from the other three. There was no contact possible, he said, except for a few notes passed between them. He did not get a chance to talk until they were allowed together for the funeral of a prisoner, Army Maj. John Schumann.

"Schumann died in July (1966) of beri-beri. This was not an act of callousness. The camp physician didn't have much experience of this type of beri-beri, and I don't think he was aware that in some cases it went to the kidneys. They did just about all they could to try to save him. They gave him every kind of antibiotic they had and they sent away for some."

Ramsey said Cook maintained military control of his men and attempted unsuccessfully to escape.

After the breakout attempt, Cook and another prisoner were chained and put on reduced rations for a week, Ramsey said.

When the Vietcong were soliciting antiwar statements, another soldier was threatened that Cook and another man would be executed unless he complied.

"That did not prompt Cook to make a statement or try to save his life," said Ramsey. "Cook's performance generally I would compare with any other individual I met in seven years in captivity in observing a code of conduct he was sworn to observe."

Asked when he had last seen Capt. Cook, Ramsey replied, "In November, 1967. We had both been extremely ill. I collapsed and was held over during a move and never saw him again."

The only period of his entire captivity when the extra penalty of solitary confinement was lifted, said Ramsey, was the time when he and Cook, both very ill, nursed one another.

In one malaria attack that reached a crisis on Christmas Eve, 1966, Ramsey said



# Years in Jungle



By Gerald Martineau—The Washington Post

Douglas Ramsey fields a question at news conference.

he was in a coma for 60 hours.

"Within 60 seconds of my going into convulsions the camp doctor was there. My pulse was 34, and if he'd been another two minutes I would not be here."

His years of captivity were spent in jungle cells in which he could stand up and do calisthenics, but were too small for pacing.

In preparation for one journey, the guards allowed them extra exercise time and slaughtered two big camp dogs. "We ate man's best friend, and man's closest relative swinging from the trees on a number of occasions and we enjoyed it," he said. They also ate roast rat he recalled.

In the camps, the men had

to listen to Hanoi Hannah propanganda broadcasts once or twice a day. At first, the men referred to them as comedy hours but he felt their effectiveness greatly increased during his captivity.

Asked whether he was forced to make broadcasts and give statements, Ramsey agreed he had, and described approaches in which he was reminded he could not survive for long without the vitamins he was being given. "It is up to you," he told the newsmen, whether this is 'forcing' or not."

His first statement was made under extreme duress in a situation that could not be revealed, said Ramsey,

while Americans were still held prisoner.

Ramsey said such statements as he made were intended to carry word of his survival and were in what he deemed to be the long-term interests of the United States. At no time did he or other prisoners that he knew of disclose intelligence-related information, he said.

Ramsey attributed his survival to "a compulsive neurosis for physical exercise." He described doing push-ups, deep knee-bends and jogging seven miles in circles. Time values had shifted toward the end of his detention, so that "thee last three years passed quicker than the first 10 months."

He occupied his mind by trying to solve an adjunct to Einstein's relativity theory and working out other complicated math problems in his head.

Ramsey told one story that seemed to illustrate a certain ambiguity in his feelings toward his former captors.

At the Loc Ninh release point, a veteran Communist soldier whose immediate family had been killed and wounded in the B-52 bombing of North Vietnam, nevertheless went out of his way to ensure that the Americans were properly treated. An American, who would carry the scars of his imprisonment forever, gave the North Vietnamese soldier all the money he had. The man accepted it reluctantly, for his wife, he said, and refused the gifts of other Americans who he felt were not sincere.

Then Ramsey turned to the newsmen and said, "Would you consider either of these men traitors?"