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POW's Tale

Of Horror In Captivity

Reuters

Washington

A U.S. civilian prisoner freed after five years of captivity in Indochina said yesterday he lived in a rat- and fly-infested cell and was fed a near-starvation diet of rice and monkey and lizard meat.

Michael Bengé told reporters that he was blind for a time and suffered beri beri, scurvy, malaria and diarrhea, all with scant medical care, and spent a year in solitary confinement.

In tears at times, he talked of forced marches through Cambodia, Laos and finally into North Vietnam, where he was put into a hut in solitary confinement without windows and with inside walls blackened with coal dust.

There was no ventilation and the only hole was a small slot, in which rats ran, he said. There were always eight or ten of them in his cell, he added. Also, one day he killed 120 flies.

CAPTURE

Bengé, 37, was an area adviser for the Agency for International Development when he was captured in Dar Lac province, during the Tet offensive of 1968. He was freed last week.

Bengé said that when he and other prisoners heard that negotiations were taking place towards ending the war, they hoped President Nixon would make no concessions to North Vietnam on behalf of their freedom.

He said that as negotiations seemed to proceed toward peace and their freedom, the North Vietnamese attempted to fatten them up, feeding them a starch-heavy

diet. Then, when talks momentarily broke down, they were put back on meagre diets.

No one knew of his capture until he was released, and he was not allowed to write letters or receive any letters or packages, Bengé said.

MALARIA

Bengé said that shortly after his capture he contracted malaria, and was delirious for 35 days, without any medical assistance being given him. He then went blind, he said, and con-

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AP Wirephoto

MICHAEL BENGÉ
 Civilian prisoner

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tracted another series of diseases and lost some of his hair and some of his teeth loosened.

Two Americans with him died during the early years of his captivity, one of malnutrition and exposure, and another, also of malnutrition. Both, he said, were denied medical care, although there were medical facilities in the area.

Bengé said that during captivity his hair turned completely white, he lost all his body hair, and lost all feeling in his right side for a period of time.

He was released by the North Vietnamese with two German medical volunteers who had been captured in South Vietnam. Three other German medical volunteers who had also been captured died in captivity.

CRITICISM

Bengé criticized the American press for publicizing U.S. and Saigon government

atrocities during the war and for ignoring similar atrocities committed by his captors.

He asked, rhetorically, why so little had been reported of the 4000 civilians massacred in Hue and another incident where, he said, North Vietnamese troops stormed into a hamlet with flame throwers, killing men, women and children.

But Bengé said he bore no animosity towards the North Vietnamese people.

He told reporters he thought the U.S. has an obligation to provide economic assistance to rebuild North Vietnam's health facilities and, perhaps, some of the homes destroyed by American bombers.

But he said the U.S. had no obligation to rebuild North Vietnamese industry because North Vietnam knew the possible consequences of a war when, in his view, it "invaded" South Vietnam.