

Civilian Says ~~Eight~~ Spied on Fellow Prisoners

Eight POWS

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Some of the eight former prisoners of war charged by an officer with misconduct spied on other POWs and occasionally donned North Vietnamese uniforms to receive favorable treatment, according to a U.S. civilian official who was a fellow captive.

The alleged collaborators, in turn, received extensive special privileges, including beer and liquor and high-protein foods, the official said.

Some of the accused POWs then asked their captors for permission to remain in North Vietnam after the war, or to be transported to a socialist or neutral country, according to the official.

Michael D. Bengé, an Agency for International Development adviser who was held in a prison camp near Hanoi called The Plantation from November, 1970, until March, 1973, disclosed his version of the conduct of the accused POWs in an interview with The Washington Post and

in an address at a high school in Gervais, Ore.

Air Force Col. Theodore W. Guy, who was the senior officer at The Plantation, filed formal charges Tuesday against five Army and three Marine Corps enlisted men for court-martial offenses ranging from aiding the enemy to constructing model aircraft for the North Vietnamese to use in target practice.

The enlisted men have denied the charges, and some have accused Guy of attempt-

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ing to demonstrate for self-serving purposes that there was a framework of military discipline in the camp when actually there was not.

One of the accused POWs prepared to file a \$1 million civil damage suit against Guy. Others said they were thinking of joining the civil suit.

The Marine Corps POWs accused by Guy are Sgt. Able L. Kavanaugh of Denver; S.Sgt. Alphonso Riate of Santa Rosa, Calif., and Pvt. Frederick L. Elbert of Brentwood, N.Y.

The five Army men are Sp. 4 Michael P. Branch of Newport, Ky.; and S. Sgts. Robert P. Chenoweth of Portland, Ore.; James A. Daly Jr. of New York City; John Young of Grayslake, Ill., and King D. Rayford of Chicago.

Bengé said he was held captive with Guy and the eight accused, enlisted men in two prison camps, over a period of about four years.

Bengé said some of the accused "cooperated willingly to the point that it resulted in others being beaten, mistreated and placed in solitary confinement for long periods of time."

At least two of the group, Bengé said, openly declared that "they would do anything to get out one day sooner."

"Some went as far as taking North Vietnamese uniforms," he added.

The special treatment accorded the cooperating prisoners, Bengé said, included allotments of Vietnamese beer, wine and liquor, candy, soft drinks, peanuts and popcorn. Some of these foods were par-

ticularly valuable to the prisoners because of their high protein content, Bengé said.

The cooperating prisoners, Bengé charged, were allowed to write letters and receive mail from home, and were given "guided tours" of Hanoi.

"The epitome of North Vietnamese hypocrisy came when the (peace) agreements were signed and these guys were told they would have to go home," said Bengé.

A 37-year-old former Marine who speaks Vietnamese fluently, Bengé currently is on a speaking tour of the West, talking about his prison camp experiences and about atrocities against the Montagnard tribesmen in the highlands.

Bengé said he first learned about the existence of a group of prisoners called "the peace committee" about three months after arriving at The Plantation.

"I tried contacting them to tell them to shut their mouths because the North Vietnamese don't allow their own people to talk. I tried to talk in the courtyard, through our communications, and tried to write them letters. I was put in solitary confinement," Bengé said.

Later, Bengé said, he and other prisoners "realized there were eight spies" in the camp to report to the North Vietnamese on the activities of other prisoners.

He said he believes that any POWs whose cooperation with the enemy resulted in beatings or other punishment for other prisoners should be discharged from the military and tried in civil courts.

"Others who made antiwar statements, willingly or other-

wise, have to live with their consciences," Bengé said. "That's punishment enough. Prison is hell for anyone."

Another Plantation prisoner, Sp. 6 John Sparks, of Chattanooga, Tenn., said he knew all eight men accused of misconduct, but that he feels their actions were based upon disenchantment with the war rather than solely an attempt to get special treatment.

"It was at a time when there was a lot of bombing going on and some of the men disagreed with the way the war was being conducted," said

Sparks. He said he believed the eight accused men wanted political asylum when the peace agreement was signed.

An Army spokesman said yesterday that Guy's written charges have been sent to the judge advocate general's office for an opinion on whether courts-martial should be held. The office will review debriefing statements made by 12 witnesses listed by Guy before sending an opinion to the Secretary of the Army, the spokesman said.

Elliott Vernon, an attorney for Daly, said Daly "realized something was in the wind" as early as April and changed his plans to re-enlist in the Army. Vernon said the Pentagon had previously assured him that former Defense Secretary Melvin Laird's "forgive and honor" policy would preclude any charges.

Vernon said he planned to contact attorneys for the other accused POWs for a possible joint legal action against Guy.

The plans to file a \$1 million lawsuit against Guy were announced by William J. Hagedorn, a Newport, Ky., lawyer retained by Branch. The suit will seek damages for defamation of Branch and his parents, Hagedorn said.

Hagedorn also said Branch was concerned that Guy's charges might upset current divorce litigation against his wife, Marilyn, in Indianapolis. The custody of two children is at stake, Hagedorn said.

Branch told the Associated Press that during most of his four years and 10 months of confinement, there was no chain of command or communications network at the Plantation.

"It was like a bazaar—chaos. Everybody was on his own. When the war was coming to an end—and this is my own opinion—Col. Guy and the other officers started making a show of order," he told the wire service.



MICHAEL D. BENGE
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