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# Ex-POW Recalls His Anti-War Role

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While leading a patrol of 17 Laotian soldiers near Khesanh, South Vietnam, on Dec. 30, 1968, Army Sgt. John A. Young was ambushed, and captured at bayonet point by Vietcong and North Vietnamese regulars.

According to his own account, he was shot through the leg, prodded on a forced march for hundreds of miles, hit with rifle butts during lengthy interrogations and made to watch two Laotians being executed as a result of his refusal to disclose his mission.

Then, he said, he was

forced to march again. In all, he spent more than five years in prisoner-of-war camps; he lost 30 pounds and occasionally, his leg still buckles under him.

Today, Sgt. Young is accused of going over to the side of the enemy that subjected him to such hardship. It is charged that Young became so fervently opposed to the war that he collaborated with the enemy at the expense of his fellow prisoners.

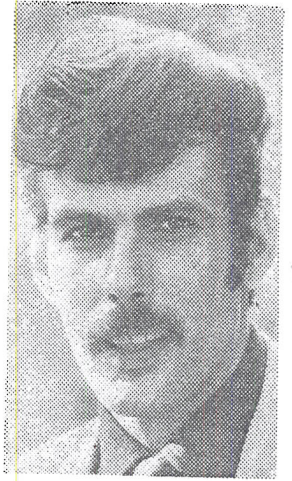
He and seven other enlisted men are specifically accused of accepting candy, beer, cigarettes and milk in return for their collaboration.

Young, a 27-year-old Green Beret who spent two of five years' imprisonment in a Hanoi POW camp called The Plantation, said he and the other accused prisoners persistently refused these special privileges until their captors threatened them with punishment if they did not acquiesce.

"It seemed like the more we complained, the more they brought us. They never got tired of bringing the stuff," Young said in an interview.

"They finally said we were going to get punish-

See POW, A4, Col. 1



SGT. JOHN A. YOUNG  
... favors under duress

# Ex-POW Denies Charges

## POW, From A1

ment if we didn't accept it. We had no choice but to take it," Young said.

"What was bad was that they did it in a way that everybody in the camp knew. They did it as openly as they could," Young said.

Young said he thinks the North Vietnamese motive may have been to cause divisiveness in the camp or to entice other POWs into making statements against the war.

Young's version of the special privileges he received conflicts with an account provided by Air Force Col. Theodore W. Guy, who has charged that the favored treatment was given to Young and others in exchange for broadcasting antiwar statements and furnishing the North Vietnamese with information about secret communications among the POWs.

The Pentagon has not yet acted on the charges against Young, four other Army enlisted men and three Marine Corps enlisted men. It could conduct courts-martial for violations of the prisoner's code of conduct and for aiding the enemy, which carries the death penalty.

In the interview, Young openly admitted writing and tape recording antiwar statements for use by the North Vietnamese. But he said he did it at his own request and out of his own convictions rather than in exchange for special treatment.

"The antiwar statements are my own antiwar statements," Young said. He said he began making such statements shortly after arriving at The Plantation on Nov. 27, 1970, and that they were based on antiwar feelings he

developed while serving in South Vietnam.

Guy has charged that Young and the other accused POWs were members of a "peace committee" that urged antiwar attitudes on other prisoners and collaborated with prison guards.

He claims that members of the committee sang communist songs, paraded a sign with an obscenity against President Nixon, requested permission to enlist in the North Vietnamese army, went on guided tours of Hanoi and built model airplanes used by prison guards for target practice.

Young denied some of the charges categorically. Some of the others, he said, are based on actual incidents but have been distorted and exaggerated, or that they involve activities undertaken by all the prisoners, including Guy.

"There was no such thing as a peace committee. That's a name the officers gave to those of us who were against the war and made statements. It wasn't our name," said Young.

Young said the officers actually called the group of antiwar enlisted men "PCs," which, he said, alternately stood for "pro-communists" or peace committee.

Young said he and 16 other enlisted men were housed in a 9-by-21-foot room in The Plantation, an 80-year-old French provincial house that once was occupied by the mayor of Hanoi.

Young said there was virtually no communication among the camp's four sections. He denied that there was any attempt to establish a POW command structure that included enlisted men.

"I never had the opportunity to get in contact with

the officers . . . I didn't know Col. Guy. I may have seen him at some time, I don't know, but I never knew him," said Young.

Young is slightly built, tall and has a thin face whose focal point is a heavy dark mustache. He speaks softly, often ending sentences in a voice that trails off into a near whisper.

He grew up in a comfortable suburban home in Grayslake, Ill., the son of a World War II Navy bosun's mate who later became an electrician.

Young dropped out of Grayslake High School at the end of his junior year to join the Army. "I was restless, and wanted to be on my own," he said.

He was sent to Germany in 1963, married a German girl, Erica, in 1965, and reenlisted for four years in the Special Forces. He now has two sons, John, 7, and Steven, 4.

Young went to South Vietnam in December, 1967, and, by his account, immediately began to question the war. "I saw a lot of hatred for the Americans and I saw a lot of suffering," he said.

A month before he was captured, Young said, he disobeyed orders and released four peasants "who were captured while hunting crabs on a beach."

On Jan. 30, 1968, Young said, he led a patrol of 17 Laotian soldiers near Khesanh when his "point" man was killed.

Most of his troops ran away and Young was shot through the leg. He said he was marched at bayonet point by the North Vietnamese to a temporary camp, beaten and questioned.

"I passed out several times. They brought in one of the Laotians and said, 'Answer, or we will kill him.' I didn't talk, and they shot him dead, right there," said Young.

Young said five antiwar POWs, including himself, were imprisoned together in a camp called by Americans "Bow Cao" in North Vietnam prior to their arrival at The Plantation. The five, he said, made up the nucleus of what later came to be called the peace committee.

Young flatly denied Guy's allegations that he tried to enlist in the North Vietnamese army. "Would I be here now if I had" he asked.

He also denied the model airplane accusation, saying that the guards sometimes used tree branches made into crosses and used them to sight their rifles. But he said he never made such devices.

Young also denied the charge about obscene anti-Nixon signs and the accusation that he attempted to influence other POWs against the war. He also denied ever wearing a North Vietnamese Army uniform, as alleged by Michael Benge, a civilian Agency for International Development official held in the camp.

But Young did admit to going on a number of guided tours to visit a museum of natural history twice, a war museum, a "war crimes exhibit," an art museum.

"Everyone in the camp went on these trips at one time or another. Some went to pagodas. Cuy went to a textile plant. Benge went to some places. Everyone went," said Young.

Young also acknowledged that the antiwar POWs were allowed to keep their cell door open, and that they went outdoors often. "We told them we didn't need it, but they left it open anyway," Young said.

Young portrayed The Plantation as a camp sharply divided between officers and enlisted men, with many of the enlisted men opposing the war and many of the officers opposing the enlisted men—but having no access to them to impose their will.

About Guy, Young said, "He's got a grudge. He wants to blame someone for everything that's happened to him. He screwed up, he was captured and he paid the consequences, and now he wants to blame someone."

"Well, I screwed up, too, and I paid the consequences of being captured. But I don't have anyone but myself to blame," said Young.