

armed forces

# POWs Find Life Harsh

ONLY FOUR of the 566 American prisoners of war who had come back from captivity since the January cease-fire had been diagnosed as suffering from "the real psychiatric problem" of schizophrenic symptoms, according to Dr. Richard Wilbur, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health and chief medical officer of the Pentagon.

"When they came off the planes (from Indochina) they looked so well we were all deceived," he said.

Actually, according to a report Dr. Wilbur released last weekend, the POWs had been in bad shape both physically and mentally. Almost one-third had major bone fractures; 15 per cent had suffered broken backs when ejected from their planes. About two-thirds had serious cases of malaria, and half had intestinal worms. All had experienced "stress reactions" in one form of depression, fright or euphoria — though the Wilbur report said "It will not last" with most of them."

## Not Over

But Dr. Wilbur also warned that POW problems were not over yet. At a weekend press conference he told newsmen that studies conducted of POWs in former wars showed they had abnormally high rates of violent deaths for three years after their release and return.

To avoid repeating such tragedies, the Vietnam POWs were to be followed by military doctors for at least another five years "whether they resign (from the military) or not," Dr. Wilbur said, and every POW's family was to receive copious counselling to

ease readjustment problems.

"A lot of their difficulties," Dr. Wilbur said of the present-day POWs, had come from "moving back into families that have gotten along without them. In most cases the wives carried on successfully alone." Then, when the husband returned and proceeded to take over again as head of

## 'Charges and counter-charges were being traded'

the household "the wife feels she's been put back in the home," while the homecoming POW "feels himself as a kind of extra. He needs a lot of help getting back into the family."

Other military doctors had noted earlier this year that the death rate of World War II POWs in Japan had averaged 50 per cent higher than the rate for the general U.S. population.

Two days after Dr. Wilbur's press conference, Air Force Captain Edward Allan Brudno, who had been a POW in Vietnam for more than seven years, was found dead at the home of his mother-in-law in Harrison, New York, the day before his 33rd birthday. A plastic bag was over his head.

## 'Despondent'

Brudno, whose plane was shot down over North Vietnam in October of 1965, was among the first group of prisoners released by Hanoi last February. His mother-in-law said he had been "despondent" ever since his homecoming.

In the meantime, charges and counter-charges were being fired back and forth between Air Force Colonel Theodore Guy and the eight enlisted men whom he had accused of misconduct while all nine of them were incarcerated in a Hanoi prison camp nicknamed "The Plantation."

Guy charged the eight — five Army enlisted men and three Marines — with contravention of his express orders as highest in command at the prison to court-martial offenses ranging from aiding the enemy to constructing model aircraft for the North Vietnamese to use in target practice.

## 'Plantation'

His accusations were corroborated by Michael Bengel, an Agency for International Development adviser who had been imprisoned in "The Plantation" for more than two years. Bengel's version, as he told it to The Washington Post and in an address at a Gervais, Oregon, high school, was that some of the eight had spied on their fellow-prisoners and occasionally even donned North Vietnamese uniforms in exchange for favorable treatment and such special favors as beer and liquor and high-protein food.

The enlisted men, however, vigorously denied the charges. One of them — Specialist 4 Michael Branch of Highland Heights, Kentucky — announced plans to file a \$1 million lawsuit against Guy, seeking damages for defamation of Branch and his parents. Several of the others accused by Guy indicated they too might join in the civil suit against the Colonel.

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