

**“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, Vietnam
...keeping the memories alive**

Phan Rang AB News No. 121

“Stories worth telling”

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3 U.S. Pilots Released by Hanoi

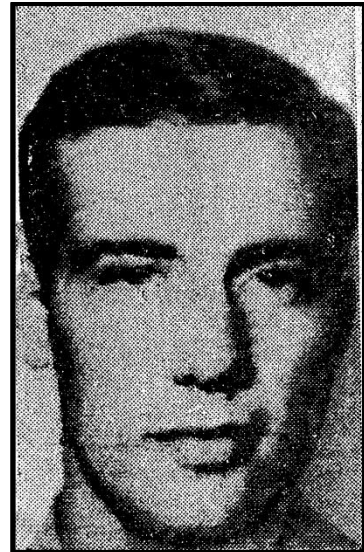
(Pacific Stars and Stripes, Sunday, Feb. 18, 1968)



MAJ. Norris Overly



Capt. John Black



Lt. (JG) David Matheny

VIENTIANE Laos (UPI) — Three American pilots were released by North Vietnam Friday after about six months in captivity.

They arrived here Friday night aboard an International Control Commission aircraft and almost immediately boarded a U.S. military DC3 to fly to an airbase at Udorn, Thailand.

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(In Washington the Pentagon said the men had arrived at the Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base and were undergoing physical examinations, AP reported.)

Maj. Norris M. Overly, senior among the three officers, speaking for the group, said, "Physically, after boarding a U.S. plane I am a little weary but mentally I feel totally unreal. I have the feeling I'm on the outside looking in at myself in a mirror."



Overly, 39 of Wheeling, W.Va., Capt. John David Black, 30, Johnson City, Tenn., and Lt. (jg) David T. Matheny, 24, of South Bend, Ind., touched down at 10:25 p.m. aboard the ICC four-engined Stratoliner after a two hour flight from Hanoi.

But it was nearly an hour later before they and the two American pacifists, the Rev. Daniel Berrigan of Cornell University and Prof. Howard Zinn of Boston University were able to get off the plane.

U.S. Ambassador in Laos William Sullivan, U.S. air attaché Paul C. Pettigrew and U.S. naval attaché Capt. Charles A. Barton spent the intervening 50 minutes arguing with the pilot and the pacifists about whether the pilots should return to the U.S. by commercial plane or go back through the U.S. military.

Although, according to Father Berrigan, both the pilots and the pacifists indicated that their return to the U.S. by a military aircraft might jeopardize the future release of other pilots. The, ambassador told them the White House preferred that they return by military flight. In the end, the pilots decided to go along with the U.S. government.

Overly came off the airplane first followed by Black and Matheny, and made a brief statement in which he said that all three had been treated well by the North Vietnamese, and added that they were released because Hanoi "wanted to show the sympathy of the Vietnamese for the peace-loving peoples of the United States."

Then all three answered questions for about 10 minutes in the glare of floodlights outside the plane.

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Overly said they would stay overnight in Udorn and fly back to the U.S. Saturday. American officials said they believed the three men would be met by their families in Honolulu.

All three appeared to be in excellent physical condition although Overly had deep red circles under his eyes. He said they had been under considerable nervous tension since, they were told two weeks ago they had been selected for release as a gesture marking Tet, the Vietnamese Lunar New Year.

Overly said the three had been kept in the prison camp system in Hanoi. He named his roommate as a Maj. George Day and a Lt. Cmdr. (John) McCain. (He did not give the first name).

He said that none of the men was indoctrinated during captivity.

Overly, who was shot down last Sept. 11, said his plane, a B-57 from **Phan Rang AB** in South Vietnam was hit in the middle of the night.

Overly said the three men were "taken good care of physically," and Matheny added "even to the extent of excellent medical care," Overly, however I was the only one of the three injured. He hurt his back on landing in his parachute. He showed no visible sign that the injury still bothered him.

Although the three pilots met Zinn and Berrigan on Wednesday, they were released from the prison camp only Friday afternoon.

Matheny, who passed his 24th birthday on Jan. 27th and had won a promotion from ensign to lieutenant junior grade while he was a captive, quipped light-heartedly, "The birthday I won't accept, but the promotion, I will," when reporters raised the subject.

Almost immediately after he made the remark, the three broke off their news conference and boarded the plane for Udorn.

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Mike Overly Didn't Need Present For Tenth Birthday

DAYTON, Ohio (AP) - No present was needed for Mike Overly's 10th birthday Sunday. He had his father home, and that was enough.

His father is Lt. Col. Norris M. Overly, one of the three American pilots freed by North Vietnam who was reunited with his family Sunday morning at Wright - Patterson Air Force Base here.



ECSTASY - Lt. Col. Norris Overly, 39, shot down over Vietnam September 11, 1967, flew 10,000 miles from a North Vietnam prison to a tearful reunion with his wife and two children at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio Sunday. Daughter Debbie, 11, wipes a tear, Momma Ruth is overjoyed and son Mike, who was 10-years old Sunday, can't seem to believe it has come true. The officer will be examined for several days at the base hospital and then will be off to his home in Detroit to be with his family for the first time since last August.

Mike, his sister, Debbie, and their mother, Ruth, a native of Portsmouth, Ohio, were on hand when the C 131 Convair touched down about 2:30 a.m.

They ran 75 feet to the plane and smothered Overly with hugs and kisses. The pilot looked pale and tired , but was overjoyed to see his family again.

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“I think it’s wonderful,” said Mike in response to a question if he was glad his father was home.

Overly, 39, of Oscoda, Mich., was brought here for a medical checkup and debriefing. He’ll be in the base hospital for at least a few days, an Air Force spokesman said. No interviews with the pilot were permitted.

With Overly was another of the released pilots, Capt. John David Black, who went on to Kelly Air Force Base in Texas. Black left the plane for a few minutes to meet Mrs. Overly and the children.

“You have the greatest father in the world ,” Black told Mike Overly.

Overly, Black and Navy Lt. (j.g.) David Matheny, 23, Bakersfield, Calif., were released by North Vietnam Friday. The three fliers were shot down over North Vietnam last fall and had been held prisoner.

Overly spent about only three minutes before newsmen here. He said he was glad to be back and seeing his family again. The Overlys spent the day relaxing and catching up on family news.

Mrs. Overly said she didn’t know her husband was a prisoner until two weeks ago. She said she had known he bailed out of the plane when it was shot down, “ but that’s all we knew.”

He telephoned her Friday from Thailand.

“I had unswerving hope because I had deep faith in God and a lot of faith in my husband’s ability,” she told newsmen Sunday.

“I prayed a lot for his safety,” she added.

Overly is expecting visits here this week from his mother, who lives in Metairie, La. He has two brothers, Fenton, of Rocky River, Ohio, and Robert, of Metairie, La . , and two sisters , Mrs. Robert Liike of Troy, Mich., and Mrs. William E. Lindsey of Wellington, Ohio.

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Overly and his wife met while he was stationed at Lockbourne Air Force Base near Columbus, Ohio. He grew up in Detroit.

Just “Left To Rot”

(The Cedar Rapids Gazette: Sunday, November 15, 1970)

By **Darrell Garwood**

WASHINGTON (UPI) - Air Force Col. Norris Overly, 41, of Detroit is one of nine men in the United States who knows what it is like to live in a North Vietnamese prison camp.

The nine are the only American prisoners who have been released. Defense department records list 1,429 others who are either known prisoners or missing.

Overly kept silent about his treatment for a long time. But, amid evidence that Hanoi does respond to pressure from families of prisoners and their supporters, he has changed his mind.



Air Force Col. Norris M. Overly, one of three American fliers freed by the North Vietnamese, is shown as he was reunited with his family in 1968. In a recent interview he described prison life for the first time.

End Silence

“ We tried silence and it did no good,” Overly told UPI in an interview. “Now we’re revealing what life is like in enemy hands. It’s something we haven’t seen before, worse than the Nazi Stalag or the North Korean compound.”

Overly was twice smashed across the side of the head with a rifle butt during interrogations because he crossed his legs, which he learned the North Vietnamese regard as a mark of disrespect. But he said:

“ You’ll be missing the boat if you emphasize that kind of cruelty. It’s the more subtle forms of torture that give us the most trouble, such as being placed in an 8 by 11 cell and left to rot, month after month end year after year.”

Pentagon records show that four U.S. prisoners have been in communist hands more than six years, 73 for more than five years, 369 for more than four years and 731 for more than three years.

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Overly, now attending the national war college in Washington, is cooperating with “Tell It to Hanoi” campaign organized by prisoners’ families in hopes that North Vietnam eventually will publish complete list of prisoners.

The National League of Families of the Missing, which runs the campaign, hopes to deliver to North Vietnamese peace delegate Xuan Thuy in Paris a protest letter with 32 million signatures calling for “humane treatment, a list of all prisoners, information about the dead, release of the sick and a free flow of mail.”

Credit Activity

Its activities already are believed responsible for a substantial increase in the number of letters received from U.S. prisoners — from 443 in 1969 to 1,449 in the first eight months of 1970.

Overly, who was a prisoner five months before his release in 1968, is a milkman’s son who joined the air force in 1951.

His encounter with the North Vietnamese began Sept. 11, 1967, when he was dive bombing a truck convoy about 60 miles north of the demilitarized zone.

Ground fire knocked out the controls of his plane. Overly ejected, landed in a rice paddy and made contact by hand radio with rescue helicopters. But they could not get to him because of intense antiaircraft fire.

Overly spent that night floundering through rice paddies. He almost panicked when he found slimy leeches accumulating on his legs faster than he could scrape them off. At daybreak he was taken prisoner by about 200 civilians, and remained in their hands for four perilous days before being turned over to the military.

The civilians paraded him through villages, beat him, spat upon him and even urinated on him, he said. Women and children, with rocks and clubs, seemed more vicious than the men. Apparently to humiliate him, the Vietnamese assigned little girls carrying automatic rifles to guard him.

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Then the military wired him to a 50-gallon gasoline drum, and placed him on a truck for the trip north. He had suffered a cut in his back when he ejected but it was diagnosed as “minor” and he received no medical attention. The wound became infected. He was placed face down on a board, his legs in stocks and his arms tied with wet ropes. He was held in that fashion for 29 days in the city of Vinh while the wound healed itself.

Long Trip

His trip to Hanoi took seven weeks, with the truck moving only at night and camouflaged with branches in daylight. was placed in the “Hanoi Hilton”, a former French prison.

It was worse, than, other prisons, Overly said, because there was limited communication among the prisoners. Only one cell door was opened at a time, and a man knew only his cellmates. Some prisoners were in solitary but Overly was lucky enough, after the first month, to have a cellmate, whom he refused to identify out of deference to the man’s family.

He said, however, that the list of 335 U.S. prisoners provided by Hanoi to peace groups is definitely not complete, if only because it does not include the name of his cellmate.

The North Vietnamese have released films of as many 40 or 50 American prisoners attending a Christmas party, but Overly had difficulty visualizing such a break in the monotony. He was a prisoner at Christmas in 1967 and was taken to no such party.

Propaganda Diversion

Food and brief respite from the cell were limited to twice a day, he said. The principal diversion was twice-daily propaganda broadcasts in English, and on these the North Vietnamese sometimes read letters taken from the bodies of slain GIs.

Some of the problems may have been “logistical rather than diabolical,” Overly said. The food, often soup and bread, was bad, but may have been fairly good by North Vietnamese standards. Also, he said, crowds of 200 to 400 persons outside his hut sometimes made him think he was facing lynch mobs, but they gathered out of curiosity as well as anger. When groups were allowed to come in and examine him, they sometimes proved to be friendly.

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One boy, he recalled, turned out to be a Christian carrying a Latin catechism. The boy was delighted to find that Overly could read the Latin to him, and returned several times.

Overly was released in 1968, at the behest of a peace group led by Prof. Howard Zinn of Boston university, and rejoined his wife, Ruth, and children, Deborah, 14, and Michael, 12.

Release Theory

He believes he was among the first released because he appeared to be in fairly good health, despite having lost 45 pounds as a result of his bout with infection.

“The idea was to show that they treated prisoners well,” he said. “They had suffered propaganda setbacks because of stories and pictures of American prisoners being paraded and beaten in villages.”

Five other prisoners were released in 1968 and three in 1969. There has been none since.

Norris Overly, Courageous, Dedicated, & Patriotic

Growing up in a military family, Norris Overly was always close to war, and in 1951 Overly joined the Air Force at the age of twenty-one to avoid the draft. During the early part of the Vietnam War he became part of the 13th Tactical Air Command Bomb Squadron and performed missions in Vietnam while stationed in the Philippines. After being captured on a mission and held as a Prisoner of War for a year, Overly returned to the United States and was reunited with his wife and two children. In returning to the U.S. Overly also brought the names of about ninety other POWs which helped save their lives. Overly later attended the National War College in Washington D.C. and continued his military career as a full Colonel until about forty-eight years old. At fifty-nine, Overly retired from his job in California, and now at eighty-two remains close to his family.

During the early part of the Vietnam War Overly received an assignment to the 13th Tactical Bomb Squadron which was assigned to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. During this time Overly rotated in and out of South Vietnam for sixty days at a time during which he would fly strafing missions in his B-57 in South Vietnam during the day, and strafing missions to interdict

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supplies in North Vietnam at night. Overly’s story begins with one of these night missions, but develops into a revealing account of the North Vietnamese’s torturous treatment of POWs as it progresses.

“On one of these missions on September 11, 1967 on a night flight ... we were supposed to reconnoiter and look for traffic and stuff, ... and I came up at about 35,000 feet out over the water and I spotted a truck on the road. So I immediately went after it, which meant losing a lot of altitude, and I ... came in at about 7,000 feet, dropped the flare, got around into position to make the proper approach, and while on the dive I became aware [that] we were hit. I felt a jolt and looked at the engine instruments, this was a two engine aircraft, and I noticed the engine instruments on the right engine were winding down and I was getting a little yaw in the aircraft. At the same time I became aware of fire on the right hand side. I was hit ... on the right wing and it knocked the right engine out and I was losing control and it felt mushy and I thought maybe I can make the water, ... and then I realized I wasn’t going to make it and finally, at the last minute I blew the canopy. ... This was a two man aircraft and the man in the back was the navigator or systems operator and our instructions [with each other] were if I ever blow the canopy and you haven’t heard from me, that means you better get out too. So I lost all contact [with him] with this going on. I tried to say, ‘eject, eject, eject!’ and I hit the canopy and it went, and I could see that we were getting pretty low and so I pulled the handles [to eject]. ... In the process I had my head down, which I shouldn’t have done, and when I did that I got a whiplash and so ... I lost my orientation. ... Because I was at that low altitude ... my parachute [had just enough time to open], ... and I touched the ground simultaneously, so if I had been a split second later I wouldn’t have made it. From that point on I was trying to evade.

I realized that I was right in the middle of an anti-aircraft placement and there were a lot of people around so I had to duck down in a rice paddy up to my chest. I was sitting down in a corner and I could hear people coming, and I still had a radio, [and]... put ... my weapon ... on the embankment. I later learned that had I picked up that weapon and tried to shoot somebody, they would have killed me. I got covered with leeches, and was constantly reaching under my fly suit pulling those things off. ... Eventually somebody jumped into the opposite corner of the rice paddy. It was very dark and I knew he was there and he knew I was there, and it was a long period of time before he moved and eventually somebody jumped behind me into the water and lowered their weapon on me, and at that point I was captured so I was immediately taken.

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The first thing they did was grab my watch, [and] they took my shoes off, they learned that if you didn't have anything on your feet you weren't going anywhere. So we went double time to a little village not too far away, and [while traveling through the villages a little boy with watches covering his arms tugged on my wedding ring, and I gave it to him in fear that he would cut my finger off]. [After reaching the village] I was put in ... [what] looked to me like what had been a bomb crater, and I was left in there for people to come in and look and see me, and they did. The place was surrounded so eventually, I think it must have been the next morning, I was turned over to what looked like ... military personnel. He was a young man with... a military jacket of some sort, and we started running from one place to another. This was light time now and I could see that I was right in the middle of a place that had been bombed many, many times. There were bomb craters full of water all over the place. The next thing I really remember about this, we were standing beside a road and there [was] a lot of traffic going south of military equipment of all sorts weapons [and] troops, and the guard that I had took pleasure in pointing this stuff out to me, meaning that ... you didn't do anything cause look what's happening. So we just went from one stop to the next and each time we stopped, villagers would gather around and I would be of great interest, I would attract a lot of attention and most of the time I was put on display and [they] let the people file by. ... If it was a man and I made eye contact with him ... [I] could kind of recognize that the guy thought 'oh my god I don't want to be you,' but if it was a woman or child I was in trouble because the woman was going to hit, [kick, beat me with sticks, and make death gestures at] me and the children were going to do the same thing, so I learned to fear the women and the kids more than anybody else. This happened night after night, ... we would stop during the day at these locations, but we only traveled at night to avoid being bombed. We traveled in a stake truck with a canvas overhead; I was in the back tied to a fifty-five gallon drum can full of fuel, and the idea was that if we were bombed they would run and I was going up with the fuel. I remember one night in particular we were caught out in the open and all of the sudden there was a flare, and I knew somebody had spotted us and they started dropping bombs and I'm looking out the back of the truck on the road and here come these phosphorescent bombs just getting closer and closer as they hit the ground. And they all ran and I thought that was the end. ... We had been around the road now somewhere around three weeks playing this cat and mouse game going up these dirt supply roads at night transporting me north, and in the daytime we'd stop camouflaged under trees so that [we would not get bombed]. ...

So we came to this area ... called Vinh [which] is a little village along the coast farther up toward Hanoi, ... and I was put in this little place that looked similar to a pagoda. ... I was taken inside

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and for the first time I was interrogated by an elderly man who looked like he had been injured. ... [The interrogation] lasted for a few hours, and I finally was taken to a thatched hut. ... Inside ... it was divided up into individual cells which would probably be... three feet and about eight feet long. The ceiling was fairly high ... and it appeared to me that there were maybe four cells on [one] side to the corner and eight on [the other] side, and I was put on the third cell to the right. They put me in this [cell] and ... [made] me [lie] on my stomach with my feet tied in ... wooden stocks ... [and] my hands tied behind my back. I had injured my back [when I landed] and it was swelling up and bothering me [very much]. I stayed in that position for 29 days and each day consisted of allowing to go outside and relieve myself ... and release from the stocks in order to eat ... a soupy gruel and a piece of bread ... once a day. ... My back was getting worse and [started to have an odor so strong that all of the guards would walk by holding their noses and try to avoid me]. Finally I was complaining about it enough, and they realized they were going [to have] to do something about it. So one night they opened the cage door and took me down to the end of the quarter and had me lay down on the ground and one man started pressing on me, and ... squeezing the puss out of my wound. I moaned a little bit and they told me to shut up, which I did, and they sprinkled ... sulfur powder and that probably helped me a lot. [Having been lying on my stomach for twenty-nine days, my chest and cheeks both became raw, and] the mosquitoes were really bad. I mean my feet [and neck] were just bitten up [and covered with bites because the mosquitoes were all around us]. Eventually they did bring in another prisoner [by the name of Bud Day]. One evening they got both of us outside and put us in the back of one of these same type of trucks, and [he] was tied to one of the steaks [and] ... looking directly out[the back], and I was on the side tied to one of the sideboards. We traveled all night at a very high rate of speed, and in the wee hours of the morning pulled ... up besides this large structure [that] turned out to be [the] Hanoi Hilton. ...

At that point I got separated from [Bud Day]. ... When I checked into the Hanoi Hilton they [immediately] put me in irons ... [in] an area that was later referred to as Heartbreak. [It] was a small area with very small cells, and inside [them were] marble slabs [where we would lie]... on our backs [and be] put in irons. Every day we would get up and were taken to a room out of this area and across the quarter to a room with a table, low stool, and a can in the corner to relive yourself].... That would start the endless interrogations. I found this was not too difficult to do. I was able to get them off the track by telling stories about just about anything. I realized not too long after the interrogations started that these people were not professional, [and] most of their effort was to demoralize you [and] make you feel insignificant. Eventually that stopped and I was put in another part of the prison which must have been close to the outside because I

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could hear civilians. I had a small aperture for air into this place. It's just what you would image an old French prison would look like, concrete quarter with cells on either side, wooden doors, and the cells were small. There were two bunks and I was the only one in there for a while, but eventually Bud Day was put in there with me. We stayed there for some period of time ... until we were transferred to another prison ... camp in the city ... called the Plantation. ... Bud Day and I were put into a cell very close to the main building and we were there for a couple of days when one day [the guards] came in and said that they have an American coming in and that he was very badly wounded. That was John McCain. They bought him in on a stretcher, and he had a body cast on had his right arm in an 'L' shape. ... I learned that he had been shot down right in the center of Hanoi. They put him on a cot, [which] were just boards with one blanket. They put him on one side, Bud Day on the other side, and me in the middle, and they gave me the instruction that [I was] to take care of this man ... [and] that if I didn't, I was going to be in big trouble. ... So I was his nurse maid for quite a while and [nursed McCain back to health]. In [each of] these cells there was a loud speaker and every time they shot down another aircraft they would announce it to demoralize us and once they identified the crew members they would make the statement [on the number of new prisoners]. This was happening several times a day [because] this was at the height of the bombing of Hanoi so there were a lot of aircraft being shot down. Back in the States, it was the height of the Vietnam anti-war demonstrations and, ... as prisoners we'd be taken over [daily] to this large building into a room [where] they had all sorts of newspapers from Washington Post and New York Times showing all the protests, and almost 24 hours a day we had propaganda on the radio claiming what was going on back in the [U.S], saying, 'look your own country is not behind you.' This was designed for demoralizations. [At the same time the North Vietnamese] were getting hounded pretty hard by the press [in the States] about their bad treatment of prisoners, so they decided they were going to identify somebody that was in pretty good health, which I was compared to others, and release us [to show that we were being treated well]. At that point they made arrangement with ... Jesuit priest and a college Professor [to whom two other men and I would be released]. We were all taken out, and after a ... lot of press [and] ... publicity ... were taken to ... the airport ... the next evening.... We flew to Laos, [met the U.S Ambassador], and ... declared that [we were going] with [him]. From that point on I was flown back to the States.”

Stevens Point Daily Journal

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1970

STEVENS POINT, WIS. 54481

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

76TH YEAR

2 SECTIONS — 20 PAGES

Hanoi's Twilight Zone Treatment Described By American Captives

Never fully awake; never soundly asleep. Never unbearably uncomfortable; never at ease.

The world of the American prisoner of war in North Vietnam is a twilight world in which he does not live but vegetates. Gradually the treadmill of deprivation and routine flattens his wit and crushes his initiative until he responds not to ideas or even to hunger or pain but, like Pavlov's dogs, only to the sound of a gong.

That, say men who have endured it, is the ultimate ordeal of the "Hanoi Hilton." The isolation and monotony of the prison, they say, surpasses in psychological horror and human degradation all the beatings and rats and diarrhea and morning emptyings of the honeybucket.

"If you think only in terms of physical torture you miss the subtlety of what we mean by inhumane' treatment," said Air Force Col. Norris M. Overly, who spent five months as a prisoner of the North Vietnamese and is now attending the National War College in Washington, D.C.

"A military man can anticipate beatings, can even expect it from someone who wants information. What he can't contend with is the sameness. The same cell, the same soup, the same propaganda, the same ... everything."

Other former prisoners concur. Even men like Navy Lt. Robert Frishman.

Exploding shrapnel shattered Frishman's right elbow when he was shot down Oct. 24, 1967. He was taken prisoner and released 21 months later, his elbow still unhealed—and his weight down 63 pounds. He now is recuperating in San Diego.

"The actual physical thing isn't so bad," he said of his prison experience. "I was struck with rocks and had knives jabbed at me and I was slapped around and tied up with ropes on my bad arm.

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But it's the isolation, the extended isolation, that gets you."

Air Force Capt. Wesley Rumble, now stationed at George Air Force Base, Calif., is another. He spent 15 months as a prisoner, calls it "the worst thing I've ever lived through" and insists "The worst thing about it was the forced boredom and the deliberate cutting of communication with the outside and among prisoners."

Overly, Frishman and Rumble are three of nine American prisoners so far released by Hanoi. The United States believes that 378 men, perhaps as many as 500, possibly many more, are being held captive among about 1,500 listed as missing in Indochina since 1964. Hanoi has refused to give an accounting of its war prisoners.

Hanoi justifies its treatment of the men—or rather its refusal to honor provisions of the Geneva Convention of 1949—on grounds that they are "war criminals" and thus not entitled to the convention's protections.

"They certainly treated us like criminals," Overly said. "The Hanoi Hilton is not a PW camp as Americans have come to think of them. It's an actual prison, a penitentiary, a place to keep felons."

Actually, Overly explained, the Hanoi Hilton is three prisons, all nearly identical and all in separate locations in downtown Hanoi. Overly spent time in all three and said the routine was the same at each.

"The light bulb was kept burning in each cell 24 hours a day," Overly recalled. "There was never any sense of day or night and never any feeling of more fatigue at one time than at another."

During the long periods of waiting, he said, the men—two to a cell, sometimes three, sometimes only one — took turns pacing the floor for exercise. They had to take turns because there was only room between the bunks for one man to walk.

Bunk is not an accurate term. The beds, Overly said, were simply three 6-inch-wide planks laid across two sawhorses.

The routine was interrupted from time to time for interrogation sessions and other activities,

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most of which were accompanied by beatings and insults.

But Overly and the others emphasized that the mental anguish, the "enforced inactivity" as he put it, and the isolation of the men from one another caused more suffering than the physical torture.

"Of course my cellmates and I got on each other's nerves a lot," Overly said "After a time we knew every minute thing about each other, our past experiences, our ideas on every subject, and about once a week we'd have one hell of a row. It was therapeutic."

"But there were tender moments too," he said, his voice lowering. "We prayed together. At least three times a day."

Propaganda broadcasts, dubbed Hanoi Hannah, consisted of repeated assertions that America would eventually withdraw from Vietnam because the American people opposed the war, Overly said.

The broadcasts were by the same three persons, two women and a man — "I'd know their voices as well as I know my mother's" — and occasionally, he said, by persons with American Negro accents telling of racial troubles. The propagandists, he said, also took great delight in reading letters taken from the bodies of American soldiers.

Overly said his captors' control over the mail the prisoners could send and receive was another diabolical form of mental anguish.

Some men were not allowed to write at all; others could write but did not receive mail and didn't know whether their letters - limited to six lines ever got out.

"I once asked an interrogator why they let some men write home and not others," Overly said, "and he quite frankly said to confuse the enemy.' "

The repatriated prisoners said many of their comrades were sick and injured and described medical treatment as primitive at best.

Frishman was refused treatment of his shattered elbow for days before his captors finally

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removed the bone splinters in a crude operation, although Dr. Robert Brown, chief of orthopedic surgery at Bethesda Md. Naval Hospital who treated Frishman when he came home, said, "He received the same treatment they give their own people. I feel his treatment was based on what might be called skillful neglect."

Frishman said he also knew of some men who received eyeglasses and some who got dental care.

For the excruciating boredom, however, there was no relief.

In their long hours of loneliness — hours when the only diversion often was watching the rats play on the cell floor or trying to identify the day's particular guard by the distinctive sound he made opening the doors cell by cell — did the prisoners ever contemplate escape?

"We talked about it often," Overly said.

"We figured we could get out of the prison — but then where would we be. In downtown Hanoi, that's where. Six-foot-tall men with blue eyes wearing red and white striped pajamas.

"No. Nobody really believed there was any way out of there."



Phan Rang Honors Sergeant (7th Air Force News, August 27, 1969)

PHAN RANG - Sgt. John M. Ramult III, Baltimore, received the Bronze Star Medal with "V" Device (denotes valor) ceremonies held here recently.

He was presented the medal by Lt. Gen. James V. Edmundson, Pacific Air Forces vice commander-in-chief.

"It was about time for midnight chow," related Sergeant Ramult, a weapons mechanic with the 435th Munitions Maintenance Squadron here, "when a B-57 flew in low over us and crashed about ten feet off the end of the runway. The aircraft burst into flames as my buddy and I ran toward it."

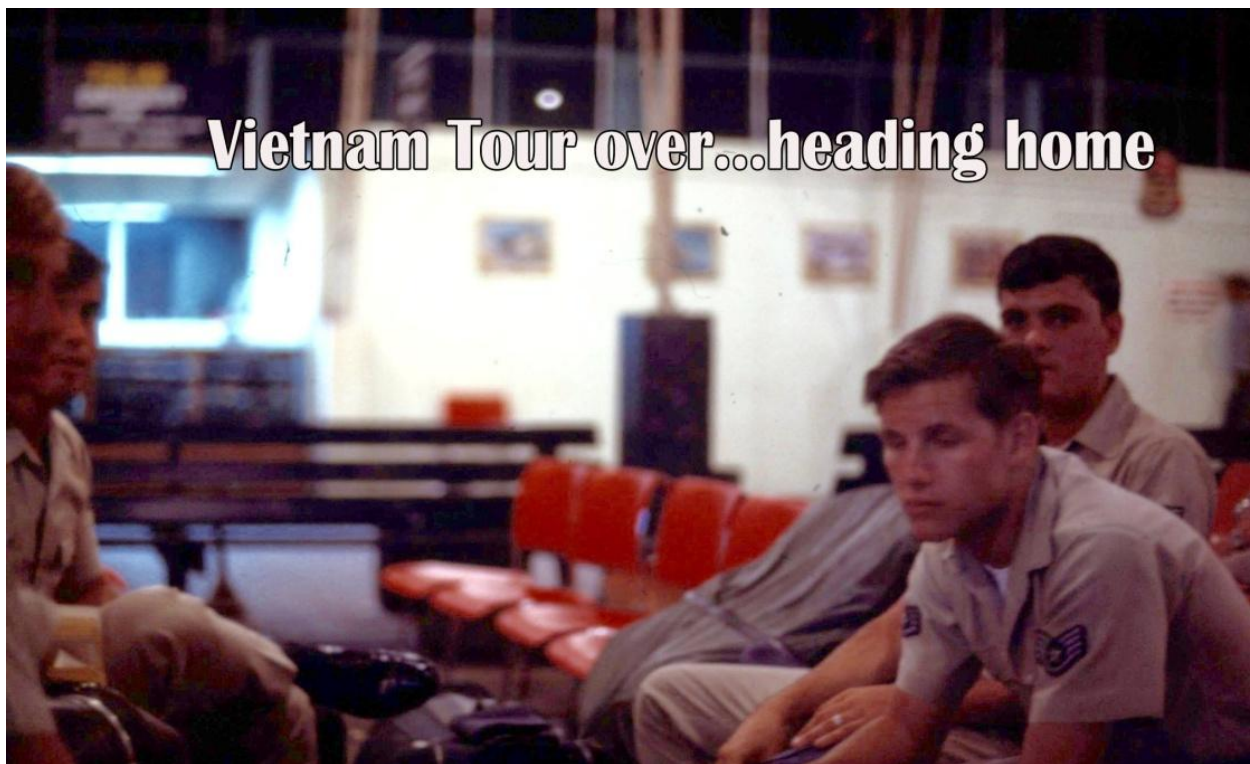
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"The pilot and navigator didn't get out of the plane and when we reached the aircraft we saw that they couldn't open their canopy. We tried to break the Plexiglas but didn't have much luck until the fire trucks arrived. My buddy got an ax from one of the firemen and he began to chop a hole in the canopy while I peeled back the Plexiglas."

"While the firemen were getting the blaze under control, we pulled the pilot out of the cockpit and took him away from the plane. The canopy suddenly came loose and the navigator was able to open it and get out of the plane by himself."



Vietnam Tour over...heading home

Waiting for the freedom bird at Cam Ranh Bay Passenger Terminal. SSgt Kirby, right foreground and John Dean behind him. Those on the left are unidentified. Photo by Gary Stone.

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(Comments made on Facebook that I feel are worth repeating.)

On Thanksgiving day 1967 I was getting on a United Airline plane with Dick Lindgren (another 435 MMS guy) ready for Hong Kong. Going through the door I spotted a stupid paper turkey hanging from the ceiling. Which prompted me to make some snide remark to the round eyed rather cute stewardess about the turkey. I was informed by this stewardess that it was in fact Thanksgiving day so lighten up. She put Dick and I in the first row on the left side of the plane. From there she gave me a hard time the entire flight, It was tough!

During this flight they served as a Thanksgiving dinner. They were about the size of a TV dinner but tasted pretty good. I inhaled mine it had been a while since breakfast. I asked my new stewardess friend if there were and more."Nope" nothing. Crap.

I looked over at Dick's tray back at mine and all I saw was 2 small servings of sweet potatoes. At that point I learned I really like sweet potatoes. Never tried them before, Stubbornness. Well when you are hungry. Found out I liked them, still do.

I remember this every Thanksgiving. It was only 48 years ago.

HAPPY THANKSGIVING DAY. AMMO rules.



Gene Bonham

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(Note: [Bob Tucker](#), Keeper of the Rolls, maintains the Phan Rang AB “Roll Call” a listing of people that were stationed at Phan Rang, listed by rank, full name, organization, and years in country. This list is constantly being updated and periodically posted on Facebook. If you do not have access to Facebook, you can request a copy from Bob and he will email you one and if you have any names to contribute, that would be appreciated as well.)

Airman 1st Class **Charles E. Palmer**, son of Mr. and Mrs. W C. Palmer, Newton, (Kansas) is a member of the US Seventh Air Force at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. (*Hutchinson News, Thursday, May 23, 1968*)

Airman **Nelson** is a security policeman at Phan Rang Air Base. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. John H. Nelson, 116 Arlington Drive, and is a graduate of Douglass High School. (*The Lawton Constitution, Monday, May 27, 1968*)

U.S. Air Force Sergeant **Richard L. Denniston**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas V. Denniston, of 6453 Baine Ave., Newark, has arrived for duty at Wiesbaden AB, Germany. Sgt. Denniston, a fuels specialist is assigned to a unit of the U.S. Air Forces in Europe, America’s overseas air arm assigned to NATO. He previously served at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. The sergeant, a 1968 graduate of Mount Eden High School in Hayward, attended the American River College in Sacramento and the University of Maryland extension Far East Division at Phan Rang Air Base. (*The Argus, Fremont-Newark, California, Tuesday, July 6, 1971.*)

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Phan Rang Challenge Coin Sale



Phan Rang AB Challenge Coins

We are going to resume coin sales for a limited time.

Order yours now before March 31, 2017 before they become collector's items.

MAIL ORDER PRICE LIST		Total Amount
Each	Price	to remit
1	\$5.00	\$7.12
2	\$10.00	\$12.56
3	\$15.00	\$17.78
4	\$20.00	\$23.00
5	\$25.00	\$28.22
6	\$30.00	\$33.44

Send Check or money order for the exact amount to

Jack Anderson, 826 72nd St. SE, Auburn, WA

98092. Please make check payable to Happy

Valley Reunion.

PHAN RANG STAFF MEMBERS

Joseph Burkhardt: Master of Ceremonies

Robert Kellington: Master of Ceremonies

Jack Anderson: Treasurer

Lou Ruggerio: Site coordinator/Contract
negotiator

Douglas Severt: Reunion Coordinator

Ed Downey/Barbara Brandt: Ceremonies

Christopher Boles: Photographer

Kirk Minert: Aircraft Historian

Bob Tucker: Keeper of the Rolls

Joe Kaupa: In Memoriam

Bruce Mueller: Badge Board

Mike Maleski: Chaplain

Jim Erixson: Chaplain

Bob Howe: Australian Ambassador

I hope that you enjoyed this issue of the Phan Rang Newsletter. This newsletter was compiled and published by [Douglas Severt](#). Previous issues of the Phan Rang Newsletter are available [here](#) for download.