EX-POW TALKS ABOUT

Life In Prison Camp

By GERARD BURKE

"I love the Orient and I like the people . . . I would love to go back to visit."

This quotation may seem strange coming from a man who has spent eight months as a prisoner of war, yet that is the way Air Force Captain Anthony Marshall, recently released by the North Vietnamese, feels.

Capt. Marshall has the "distinction" of being the only black POW in the Washington metropolitan area. He graduated from Frederick Douglass High in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, in 1964 and attended the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

He lives now with his mother and sister in a modest home at 2825 75th Pl., Kentland, Md., a largely black-populated suburban area located about 10 miles east of Washington. There Capt. Marshall talked through a mouth still numb with novocaine about his experience in the POW camp. He had just returned from the dentist.

All about him were pleasant mementos of his tours of duty in Southeast Asia. There were two large wicker lounging chairs that literally begged to be sat in. The chairs were shaped like slightly tilted bowls lined with soft, sea blue cushions that matched the thick rug in the cozy living room.

In front of where Capt. Marshall sat was a low-riding hard-wood table that would probably cost almost $1,000 stateside. The officer got it for $200.

Considering its intricately carved top and sides, the table was a tremendous bargain. Carved into the top of the table was an Oriental village scene. This was covered by a sheet of plate glass set into the table.

"NOT BITTER ABOUT ANY OF IT"

Of his incarceration in the camp, Capt. Marshall said, "I'm not bitter about any of it. I considered it a worthwhile experience. I tried to learn as much as I could."

After awhile, Capt. Marshall went upstairs and came back down with a memento that was somewhat less pleasant: his POW uniform. Out of the prison camp atmosphere, the uniform looked more like a colorful pair of loose-fitting pajamas, with wide, burgundy striping.

Capt. Marshall was captured in July, 1972 and taken to a prison camp on the outskirts of Hanoi. At the time of his capture he told the North Vietnamese that he was a photographer, hoping that they would not expect a photographer to know much. They apparently believed him.

He "had intended to escape as soon as possible" but abandoned that idea mostly because of the exposed locale of the camp. On one side was a well-traveled street. On the other was an open field in which farmers worked crops.

As he described it, Capt. Marshall's time in camp did not appear too rigorous. He was interrogated briefly three times and was not tortured. He knew of no one else among the other 30-odd prisoners who were.

"I'm Not Bitter . . . I Consider It
A Worthwhile Experience . . ."

The prisoners had a steady, if periodically monotonous diet of mostly vegetables. They were allowed to shower, using Vietnamese soap. Capt. Marshall nonchalantly added that one had to rinse the suds off quickly or suffer burns from the strong, lye-based soap.

SLEPT WITH LIGHTS ON

Each morning, the prisoners were awakened at 6:30 and told to come outside. They were not compelled to do so; those who did not were simply locked in the barracks for the rest of the day.

Capt. Marshall commented, that after spending a night in the barracks, "You'd want to get out, to wash, to get some air, to get away from people or just to get out in the sunlight."

Captain Anthony Marshall and his mother, Mrs. Anne Marshall.
(Photos by Cliff Cabell)

Lights stayed on all night, but that did not stop Capt. Marshall from sleeping. "Nothing will stop me from sleeping," he equipped. "I slept through most of the December (1972) bombing. I could see the bombs flashing (as they exploded). I just figured if I got hit, I wouldn't know it."

There were, considering the circumstances, a surprising amount of activities available at the camp. Basketball, (on the prison court), ping pong, books, card-playing and chess occupied the POWs' time.

And there was plenty of time for thinking. "For the first time, I realized that I was out there by myself, half a world away," Capt. Marshall said. "This guy (the North Vietnamese) had me and could do anything he wanted with me. It was an empty feeling; it shakes you and makes you appreciate life a little more.

"It's unique," Capt. Marshall continued, "to be penned up with people 24 hours a day. You get to know them quite well. You talk over a lot of things."

After he was at the prison camp for about one month, Capt. Marshall and the other prisoners began to hold frequent sessions in which they would merely talk about the things that bothered them.

"NO HARD FEELINGS"

Asked about what these "annoyances" were, the young (26) officer laughed and said that most seemed so insignificant that he could not remember them. Then he recalled some of the things he had talked of during these "encounter group" sessions.

"I didn't like the way someone ate and some guys talked about someone not cleaning the comb after using it," he recalled. The prisoners all felt good after the sessions, getting things off their chests that they might keep pent up in normal circumstances. And "there were no hard feelings," Capt. Marshall added.

The prisoners were fed three times a day, partaking of a varied diet that got monotonous in certain seasons. The POW diet basically consisted of soups and side dishes. A frequent soup was made of pumpkin mixed in with noodles, fish, potatoes and sometimes meat. Side dishes included bean sprouts, soybean cakes, fried pork and other Oriental foods.

Vegetables appeared plentiful. There were cabbage, potatoes, cauliflower, spinach. The prisoners were allowed fruit once or twice a week. This consisted of oranges, grapefruit, watermelons, papaya, jackfruit (a

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Capt. Marshall Enjoying A Good Home Cooked Meal Prepared By His Mother
(Photos by Cliff Cabell)

Playing His Favorite Tapes

In His POW Outfit

Getting A Good Shot At His Sister, Sue, An Antioch College Graduate

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sweet, pulpy Asian fruit that Capt. Marshall liked especially) and pineapples.

If few prisoners got sick, perhaps it was because of this surprisingly nutritious diet. Even so, there were constant bouts with diarrhea for some prisoners.

Those prisoners who got sick apparently had to do without medicine as long as possible. "They don't believe in taking a lot of medicine. If you ask for it, they will bring it to you. But they might come four hours after you asked for it (the medicine)."

Capt. Marshall nonetheless had no illusions about his treatment at the camp. The prisoners were treated lightly because the North Vietnamese were getting us ready to go home," he said. "They treated us fine so we could say they treated us fine when we got home," was his opinion.

PROPAGANDA THE BIG INTEREST

His captors did not press him very hard for information. The officer was questioned for about 20 minutes on three separate occasions and apparently satisfied the North Vietnamese with his answers.

Besides, as he said later, "They knew more than I did about what we (the U.S. forces) were doing. They had been watching us for about seven years so they knew what we were going to do. They didn't appear that interested in military information. They were more interested in propaganda."

Asked about the comments of actress Jane Fonda, who claimed that recently released prisoners were lying when they said they had been tortured by the Vietcong and North Vietnamese, Capt. Marshall was cool and logical.

"She seems to have a habit of putting her foot in her mouth," he began. "She didn't realize that the only side she saw was the side they wanted her to see. I'm sure she's sincere, but she's going about it the wrong way. She is making gross statements that have no basis in fact."

Capt. Marshall does not let such comments bother him unduly. He is too busy visiting friends (he has been to California and Florida since being home), and answering the 100 to 150 letters "kids" wrote to his mother during his captivity.

Mrs. Marshall does domestic work. Sue, his sister, is a graduate of Antioch (O.) College and works in Washington at the Urban Institute.

Summing up his experience, Capt. Marshall said, "I'm not bitter . . . I considered it a worthwhile experience. I tried to learn as much as I could. . . . I liked the people, too. They are friendly and live a simple, quiet life that appeals to me."