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When Hell was in Session

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136 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

general, naval strategy in the modern world is less concerned with contributing to victory in war than with furthering national interests short of war." This is a point naval planners are apt to forget.

The conclusion of this remarkable book is essentially good news: "The historic naval powers have had to adjust and are in the process of adjusting their thinking to the new circumstances." Booth shows how some adjustments have already been made and he provides us with the tools to make additional necessary adjustments.

He writes clearly, concisely and to the point. He avoids trendy phrases and words, which frequently confuse more than they enlighten. No naval officer and no student of international politics should ignore this incisive and thought-provoking study. One can only hope that the leadership of the U.S. Navy will read and study it, along with the responsible political leaders. They ignore it at our peril.

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Denton, Jeremiah A., Jr. with Ed Brandt. *When Hell was in Session*. New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1976. 235pp.

Secretary of Defense McNamara was aboard the U.S.S. *Independence* on 18 July 1965 when Commander Denton led 28 A6 Intruders to bomb a cluster of warehouses on the south bank of the Ma River. On a previous strike five planes had been shot down over this heavily defended area. As Denton led the flight in and released his bombs a seemingly light hit knocked out the plane's airbrakes. As he pulled it softly out of its dive a second hit knocked out all controls. In slamming the rudder to keep the plane level he snapped a tendon in his left thigh. He and his bombardier-navigator ejected from the

plane and Denton landed in the river where he hoped to escape by swimming downstream under water. However, his painful left leg was useless and he was quickly captured by North Vietnamese soldiers who followed him down the bank. He was destined to spend nearly 7½ years in prison, 4 of them in solitary confinement.

Hanoi broadcast that Denton and his flight had been personally sent on its mission by McNamara to bomb civilians and the captured airmen would be treated as imperialist war criminals. Although North Vietnam had signed the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war it evaded the Convention's code of decency through the fraudulent blanket charge of American imperialism. As the crippled Denton was brought into Hao Lo prison he was welcomed by the strains of Yankee Doodle whistled from one of the cells and he knew there were courageous countrymen on hand. Labeled the Hanoi Hilton this full city block compound was eventually to hold some 700 American prisoners before the war ended.

Although Denton was the first A6 pilot captured, his jailers made no attempt to get military information from him but pressed hard for statements they considered of propaganda value. They tried to get him to say that McNamara had ordered him to bomb civilians and in their obsession with this charge he sensed the North Vietnamese greatly feared bombing attacks. As the war with its bombings continued the Hanoi Hilton and its related prison camps became a battlefield where the captors relentlessly strove to break the spirit of their prisoners, using increasingly cruel bodily tortures in the process.

The backbone of prisoner resistance was the Code of Conduct issued as an Executive Order by President Eisenhower in August of 1955. This code stresses the necessity of a chain of

command leadership promoting strict discipline. Its key clause is: "I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country or its allies or harmful to their cause." Providentially a series of senior officers resilient in spirit and body managed to keep this code a vital influence throughout the long years of captivity. This victory was won only by men determined to resist until broken by excessive pain and when recovered to resist until torture broke them again. This amazing leadership and discipline was maintained through a variety of communication systems encouraging morale and keeping the scattered areas of the hugh prison posted on all that went on. Morse, tap, vocal sounds and light and shadow codes were constantly employed to evade the relentless efforts made to disrupt these skillful systems. Denton's fascinating material on prisoner communications and how to maintain them under ruthless scrutiny should form invaluable pages in a training manual for any American force ever sent to fight on or over foreign territory.

The treatment given prisoners varied as American bombing attacks increased or waned with food at times reduced to starvation levels with some prison leaders given only a piece of bread and a cup of water per day. Early in February 1966 as Denton refused to write biographical material his hands were cuffed behind him and his feet placed in heavy irons with a 5-foot bar between them making walking difficult. He was beaten several times daily by tough guards who hauled him to his feet as often as they slugged him to the cell floor. He stopped eating in order that a weakened condition might enable him to lose consciousness more quickly. After 7 days of such treatment he hysterically caved in and wrote a useless biography of half-truths and fiction. He sensed that the prison officials were not so much interested in eliciting truth as they were in forcing tortured prisoners

to capitulate and make any sort of confession useful for North Vietnamese propaganda.

Besides being beaten with fists and rods the torture sessions centered on the use of restrictive rope bindings under the direction of a guard all the prisoners feared as a coldly efficient master torturer. Arms would be bound behind the back from shoulders to elbows as tightly as strong guards could pull the ropes. The agony was threefold, the terrible pinching of the flesh, the acute pain as the heart labored to force blood through the strangled veins and the even more intensified pain as the ropes were loosened and blood flowed back to restore circulation. The dreadful epitome of this brutal treatment was the technique of binding arms and legs together to force the body into a foetal position. After one such frightful session frustrated guards placed a cement-filled iron bar across Denton's shins and took turns jumping up and down on it. After several hours of such abuse he whispered *bao cao*, the words for surrender. Trying to write out a confession of war guilt he did not realize he could only make spirals on the paper. His taped confession was so incoherent that when broadcast throughout the prison his fellow Americans realized the terrible ordeal he had suffered before caving in. A message was tapped through to his cell: "We want to express our admiration for the man who is keeping his cool under this kind of pressure. We are proud to serve under his leadership." The torture-weakened Denton felt it was one of the happiest moments of his life.

Over a 15-month period he went through six such major torture sessions with his fate duplicated by many more of the officers their captors regarded as the leadership element among the prisoners. Some had limbs permanently crippled. For these Americans hell indeed was in session. As Denton entered the fifth day of a torture session from

the depths of despair he silently confessed to God his inability to resist any longer and offered his body and soul as a sacrifice to the Almighty. God's answer came in the form of an intense mystical experience wherein a profound sense of peace calmed his mind and completely eased his broken body. Despite what he terms the most deeply inspiring moment of his life as the months and years dragged on Denton thought his chances of coming out sane enough to lead a normal life were one in fifty.

Earlier in his captivity Denton was displayed before television cameras while being questioned by North Vietnamese reporters. While fending off their queries he seized the opportunity to send a vital message to the outside world. Staring into the bright lights of the cameras he blinked his eyelids with rapid and slow movements to spell out in Morse code the letters T . . . O . . . R . . . T . . . U . . . R . . . E. The film was eventually shown in the United States and naval intelligence picked up his signal and had the first proof of the crimes being committed within the Hanoi Hilton. For this daring and keenly intelligent deed he was rewarded with the Navy Cross after his return to America.

It was devastating to the North Vietnamese that prisoners so totally at their mercy would continually resist until physically broken and then after brutally induced confessions would build up their strength to again defy them. For the prisoners' recovery from torture became a way of life. They knew they were united in a common cause to defeat a cruel enemy and this common cause of their fellowship in suffering gave them amazing strength and recuperative power. Denton came to feel that in a very real sense they were making their captors their prisoners. He took comfort in recalling the dictum by Clausewitz: "It is principally the moral forces which decide." His

fervent religious faith united with a love of his country continually strengthened him. Even so as breaking points neared and he screamed with pain he prayed to die and longed to commit suicide. Then as he slowly recovered from a torture session he would renew his devotions by saying the Mass in Latin and English and making spiritual communions. He even composed Christmas and Easter poems which were communicated throughout the prison complex and memorized by many of the men. The victory of the Cross inspired the lines: "Dark clouds can hide the rising sun, and all seem lost, when all be won!" Gradually as prisoners became united in resistance and suffering they became more deeply aware of their common brotherhood and God's love for them. Their coded conversations back and forth usually ended with the letters GBU (God bless you).

Late in 1969 the torture sessions and prison restrictions eased considerably. Regular medical inspections took place and the food was much improved in contrast to earlier periods when the North Vietnamese seemed determined to starve them to death. The prison commandant struggled with his inability to break permanently his prisoners. He developed a nervous tic over one eye along with trembling hands and was relieved from command. Before disappearing he admitted to Denton that the prison officers and guards in their rage over the bombing attacks had violated the Vietnamese tradition of humane treatment.

Denton sensed his captors deeply feared that President Nixon might very well have the war fought through to an allied victory and hold the North Vietnamese Army responsible for war crimes. Denton stresses that he and all the prisoners he knew were convinced that continued heavy airstrikes were the key to allied victory. He feels such a victory was possible as early as mid-1966. Even as late as December

1972 when President Nixon ordered the B52 raids halted on Christmas Eve Denton prayed the President would promptly renew them. He believed it to be the decisive moment of the war. Air defenses around Hanoi had been obliterated and the prison officers and guards were a thoroughly frightened enemy. They deferred to the senior officers among the prisoners and strove to portray themselves as good guys who should be safe from retaliation.

Denton strongly believes that American apathy and disunity lost the war for the allies and resulted in the betrayal of millions of southeast Asians. He bluntly claims that the allied defeat was due to the "most incredible and most dangerous string of miscalculations and blunders in our history." Hawk and dove historians will debate such conclusions for decades to come.

As prison conditions eased with the Americans allowed to visit between cells and exercise outdoors the tight discipline of the harsher years tended to weaken. Increased freedom led to arguments over card games with some clashes ending in slugging matches. Leaders like Denton found it more difficult to promote discipline and an unbending policy towards their captors as the war wound down. The prisoners lost the brave spirit which had bound them so closely together throughout the years of harsh adversity.

With the end of the war Denton led the first group of released prisoners on the flight to Clark Field in the Philippines. His simple words on landing were, "We are profoundly grateful to our Commander in Chief and to our nation for this day. God bless America."

This reviewer is forced to wonder if Denton and his fellow prisoners who from jail cells and solitary confinement fought a relentless war with a vicious enemy were no more than average Americans or an elite group intensely proud of their national heritage and determined to prove its superiority even

under hideous tortures. Our nation in the future may well desperately need elite groups fervent in religious faith and patriotism. Denton's little book of travail is perhaps the best training manual yet written by a military man on what it takes to achieve such heroic heights.

CANON LOCKETT F. BALLARD

Estes, Thomas S. and Lightner, E. Allan, Jr. *The Department of State*. New York: Praeger, 1976. 272pp.

This volume is one of a series comprising the "Praeger Library of U.S. Government Departments and Agencies." It represents the 34th volume of a series edited by Dr. Ernest S. Griffith and Dr. Hugh Langdon Elsbree, whose purpose is to provide an up-to-date, comprehensive, and detailed discussion of the American federal bureaucracy. This particular volume was first assigned to the late George V. Allen. Upon his death, the present authors took over the work. In the book as published, they have retained a first chapter written by Ambassador Allen on the diplomacy conducted prior to the Constitution.

The book contains ten chapters and four appendixes, plus a number of useful organizational charts. These appendixes and charts enhance the book's value considerably. For example, Appendix D is a listing of 12 foreign affairs manuals giving the main regulations of the Department of State.

For a compact book, its scope is broad. After the initial background chapter the book traces the development of the Department of State to its present organization. It then turns sequentially to policymaking and policymakers, to educational and cultural exchange, and interagency relations. Chapters VII and VIII deal with foreign affairs and the U.S. Congress, followed by the State Department and the public. The final chapters consider multilateral diplomacy and then the State Department in a changing world.