

1976

Prisoner of War: Six Years in Hanoi

Jon D. Reynolds

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Reynolds, Jon D. (1976) "Prisoner of War: Six Years in Hanoi," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 29 : No. 1 , Article 15.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol29/iss1/15>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

102 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

in depth seven cases involving 21 strategic and tactical decisions. The cases range from the decision to make Jerusalem Israel's capital to the decision to mobilize and strike in June 1967. Unfortunately, the book was completed prior to the outbreak of the October war and the development of Secretary Kissinger's new diplomatic initiatives. Brecher's methodology, however, provides a useful framework and a cluster of analytic tools that can be used to study more recent developments.

The author deals with each problem not only from the approach of the traditional rational actor but also from the standpoint of internal factors, including the psychological and operational environment, attitudinal stances of various elites, and the methods and outlooks of different bureaucracies. Brecher concludes with 50 hypotheses about how states behave. Individually, they are interesting and worthy of further development, but whether or not the Israeli experience can be applied to other states of vastly different size and structure seems at best problematical. Nonetheless, the author has produced a thoughtful study of one nation's decisionmaking process and offers useful hints concerning the wider application of his conclusions.

STEVEN ROSS
Naval War College

McGrath, John M. *Prisoner of War: Six Years in Hanoi*. Annapolis, Md.: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1975. 128pp.

Dramesi, John. *Code of Honor*. New York: Norton, 1975. 271pp.

Lt. Comdr. Mike McGrath's book represents one more effort "to set down our own record of what really went on inside the walls of the Hanoi prisons." This former POW's unique contribution to this effort is his artistic talent. His book consists of a series of original pen and ink sketches with annotations which, for the most part, trace the

author's experiences from his capture in 1967 until his repatriation almost 6 years later.

McGrath's sketches have real meaning for those who were confined in the prisons of North Vietnam. "Talking through the wall," the "Hanoi Honey Bucket," the "rope trick" and "shackles" are but a few examples of scenes and objects with which any former POW is intimately familiar. He easily identifies Little Vegas, the Annex, the portraits of the interrogators, and the instruments of persuasion, the ropes and irons. These scenes can never be forgotten. Their memory is printed on the mind of a former prisoner as indelibly as the physical scars on his wrists and ankles.

McGrath complains, however, that his drawings are "too soft," that there are impacts and emotions associated with his subject matter that he could not convey on paper. How does one draw boredom, pain, squalor, and hate? How does one depict the suffering of human beings confined in unventilated rooms during the long subtropic summers, when human bodies become roseate with heat rash and men, exhausted because of their inability to sleep, lie motionless on their concrete slab bunks, staring endlessly at some distant spot, their minds in the future or in the past, but rarely in the present? How does one draw the jingle of keys at night or the screams from the prison courtyard or the grunts of prison guards, whose obscenities with animals and among themselves are so foreign to Western men?

The scenes which Mike McGrath selected are typical and accurately reflect the experiences of an American POW in North Vietnam from 1965 to 1969. Unfortunately, the author has provided only two sketches of Camp Unity, that section of the Hanoi Hilton which was used as a collection point for all POW's following the 1970 Son Tay raid. From the time of this assembly at

PROFESSIONAL READING 103

Camp Unity to the end of the war, the experience of American POW's changed substantially. Physical punishment and routine suffering were less of a consideration. Interminable boredom became the foremost obstacle with which each man had to cope.

An objective account of the manner in which Americans confronted their collective and individual frustrations in the large open bay cells of Camp Unity suggests a new approach for relating the Vietnam POW experience. So far, the literary efforts of most former POW's and their pen men have been largely biographical. With few exceptions, the names can be interchanged, and the experiences follow in about the same chronological order; shootdown, capture, torture, boredom, and release. *Code of Honor*, by Lt. Col. John Dramesi, is an exception to this now monotonous pattern.

His caustic observations on life and leadership in the Hanoi Hilton, as far as he develops them, are accurate. That which he leaves unsaid, however, destroys his credibility among those who are reasonably familiar with the details. His is a good story though, and although certain parts of it read like fiction, it is a thought-provoking polemic which differs from the standard autobiographical sketches.

Perhaps a detailed account of a day in Camp Unity, or a day in any of the camps, would have to be presented through a fictional medium. Few readers would believe the measures adopted by the prisoners to insure their physical and mental sanity as they collectively or individually maintained a protracted struggle against exploitation by their captors. They did laugh at one another while in irons, in their own refuse, with their wrists locked behind their backs. They laughed at the incredulity of it all. If their methods seem to exceed the norm, their success can still be measured by their dignity during and after repatriation. A significant

recounting of their story still remains to be told. Mike McGrath's drawings, however, vividly portray some aspects of one of the few campaigns which Americans won during the Second Indochina war.

JON D. REYNOLDS
Major, U.S. Air Force

[Major Reynolds was a POW from November 1965 to February 1973. Ed.]

O'Neill, Bard E., Alberts, D.J., and Rossetti, Stephen J., eds. *Political Violence and Insurgency*. Arvada, Colo.: Phoenix Press, 1974. 518pp.

In this book the contributors take a scientific approach to the study of the causes of insurgency in general and six specific insurgencies in particular. They have identified a set of "major analytical variables," which are: the effectiveness of the government, popular support, organization of the movement, external support, and environment. In each of the six studies of insurgency examined the author analyzes these variables in great detail, both as to effect on each insurgent effort and on the corresponding government counter-effort.

Most military readers are familiar with the more recent or highly publicized insurgencies in Indochina, Algeria, Malaysia, and Cuba. The editors have provided valuable and useful information as well as analysis of lesser known insurgencies: Thailand, Guatemala, the IRA in Northern Ireland (1968-74), the Tupamaros in Uruguay, the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq, and, prophetically, Portuguese Africa (Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau).

Initially each study was confusing. It was difficult to isolate the issues and the participants on both sides. Through no fault of the editors or the contributors (most of whom are on the Air Force Academy faculty), the situations themselves are confusing. For instance, the chapter on the IRA in Northern Ireland