

The life and times of american pows in korea

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The world war two as well as the cold war was understood in a different concept from the Korean War. In them the Americans fought for both survival and virtue not Realpolitik, there was little chance in the imaginative minds for negotiation even though the general public had a very simple understanding of the Korean conflict.

The U. S government planners tempered their own impressions with such strategy and belief of thrust and parry. The U. S interest in the Korean peninsula is often said to have been limited in that planners were ready to cut their losses in the event that the conflict challenged to undermine the global preponderance of power.

Thus, there were various effects whose magnitudes were immeasurable. For instance, the shootings within the peninsula may have been limited, but the magnitude of fear among the fighting soldiers was not.[1] The fighting was so intense and fierce as well as unpredictable that even Seoul, changed hands about 4 times. Initially the Americans seemed to have won the war when General Douglas until the people's republic of china got involved in the war.

The Chinese army and other communist forces surrounded the Americans to hand them their worst defeat ever. The often called " great bug out" was a cruel shock and a rude awakening to a nation that had invented the atomic bomb, beat the Axis of " evil" attained prosperity while rebuilding Europe and with the belief that their Asian counterparts were backward and incapable of mounting any major challenge.

The Chinese propaganda machine put a lot of emphasis on allied atrocities as well as conversion of POWs to Marxism. [2]At the early stages of the wrangles over peace terms Republic of China started relentless changes of germ warfare. A majority of the reports published were supported by confessions relieved from POWs who were under () with often supervision from international inspectors with varying credibility.

A large number and probably all the germ warfare confessions were falsified. At the end of the armistice talks, most of what was left was dedicated to the prisoners with the talks lasting for about half the time of the war. More recently the thesis that the Korean prisoners of war certainly prone to collaborate have been judged as a tenacious one, even though it had been meticulously debunked as early as 1963 by the pentagon.

The situation in Korea was that of captivity being different rather than the captive. The U. S prisoners were coerced to give confessions in Marxist jargon. Instead of having just a quite session to inform fellows, as had been the case in earlier conflicts. The Korean was encompassed periods of incarceration as cruel as any American encounter, with about a third perishing resulting in a highly coercive atmosphere.

If by any chance there was collaboration in Korea, then the situation can best be explained by the demands of the captors as well as the conditions the captive were subjected to instead of just a decline in character of youth. Although the POWs, may not have a permanent or profound revolution in their thought patterns still they were subject to vigorous and routinely indoctrination processes. This kind of methodology was responsible for a

large number of collaboration that superficially appeared as a personality transformation.

Within the camps, separating officers and “ natural” leaders from the rest of POWs did the segregation. Such tactics like the encouraging race, class as well as political affiliation so as to abrade personal ties and group places among the POWs. Albeit the Chinese forces proclaimed the policy of “ leniency” it was often on the theoretical basis as most the camps were inherently coercive. In this often-coercive environment the Chinese forces added a forum from where the prisoners could often be minutely scrutinized for compliance.

A brief summary of personal accounts from some of the soldiers who took part in the Korean War would probably provide a better insight to the flight of the prisoners of war. After graduating from high school (1950) Tom Gaylets was recruited in the U. S army, fort Knox, Kentucky for a period of six weeks. He later joined his brother and other soldiers who were in Korea. His unit has changed with the duties of blowing up bridges making roads while at same time removing and locating enemies.

This particular unit according to tom moved up and down Korea encountering 21 battles in extreme weather condition. (summer 100 degrees) to less than 40 degree in winter) the experience according to him was like “ a hell hole because we fought the war 24 hours a day seven days a week”.[3] There was no such a thing as taking a break. The soldiers were always at the frontline.

The following year (may 17 1951) tom was called up by his commanding officer with the excitement at the prospect of arriving home was short lived the following morning when Chinese soldiers attacked their division. After a while the Chinese soldiers captured them, they were taken to a holding area until later at night in order to move them. After that the torture exercise began the Chinese made them carry sickness, hunger, and fatigue! They were not offered anything to eat by the Chinese soldiers, and ate anything that they could find on their way.[4]

The food that was served to soldiers was terrible though there was a gradual change after some time. For instance there was one point where tom says that they were served rice and noticed some piece of meat in the rice. Thinking that things had changed for better the soldiers were upbeat only to realize the following day that a rat had accidentally gotten in to their food but the Chinese soldiers intentionally ignored and instead went a head to serve it to them.

They were not served meat in their meals until some time in 1953. In the course of his stay at the camp as a POW tom says in the book that about 1, 500 men died. During the winter seasons the dead soldiers were wrapped and chopped on the hillside without any decent depict an act of dehumanization. Tom himself almost succumbed to death due to various factors like starvation, bouts of dysentery and apparently about 100 pounds. [5]

The Chinese soldiers were constantly looking for excuses in order to punish the POWs. A friend was routinely (every morning) put in a four -by- four foot-

hole and left for the rest of the day with a hat on his head. After that he would be taken out of every night only to be returned the next morning where he would fill out information with his hat on and then taken back to the hole. When Tom left to go and see some of his friends in the other company the Chinese soldiers would move him into a hut they start a fire there and leave him closed up for days.

Another account by a soldier named David is a description of the deplorable conditions that they were subject to. After eluding the enemy soldiers for a couple of days, David and his compatriot were captured they were then taken through their initial positions and in fields and then hidden under a cliff during the day. (Out-doors) they were not offered any sanitation or medical care. The food that was served to them was a brown powder and which was very little in quantity. This state of affairs was routinely carried out until June of 1951 when they were moved to a mining camp.

At this stage a large number of prisoners began to die from starvation, while others died as a result of no medical care for the wounds and injuries sustained and others died from torture. Within his camp everyone according to David was plagued with dysentery that resulted in a large number of soldiers dying in this camp. After about three months at the camp the soldiers then started moving them out to new camps. The transfer involved a grueling process with no food while at the same time some of them were bombed by the U. S B24 which resulted in even more deaths.

During the winter seasons some prisoners were given a pair of cotton pajamas but this all they had for the remaining seasons in spite of the

fluctuating weather conditions which could go as well as below zero by about 40-50 degrees in the cold season be as lot as this in the included: body lice, dysentery, pneumonia, skin disorders, intestinal disorders, night blindness, beriberi, frostbites and the more insensitive one was the threat to be executed which often accompanied all Out of the approximately 7, 190 prisoners of war, who were captured largely in the first months of the war, about 3, 000 of them are estimated to have died in captivity about 43% of the mortality were as a result of starvation in a period that last about for six months (Nov 1950-Apr 1951. often the Chinese soldiers communist apologist normally argue that the U. S bombed most of the areas, thereby preventing the delivery of food.[6]

However, some soldiers also claim that even though a large apart of the North Korean supply were heavily bombed most of the camps where the POWs were situated were right on the border of china, which had been exempted from bombing.

Although the purposeful starvation of the American POWS had ceased in the early summer of 1951, a new phase of treatment greeted the POWs. This phase easy characterized by very disturbing experiences even to the American public than the initial murder by starvation method; the mass indoctrination in propaganda that were anti-American in philosophy often referred as brainwashing as well as the recruitment of the prisoners of war to regurgitate/repeat the learned propaganda in signed statements and even public broadcasts took hold.

Even though the “ brainwashing” term eventually fell out of favor, due to the belief by psychologists that the communist indoctrination had no permanent effect on a majority of POWS as soon as they returned, it however was both a mental and physical torture process.

In the history of the war they were some points (1950-1951) that are considered significant. For instance, the purposeful starvation of POWs by the Korean and Chinese soldiers often broke the spirit of the prisoners. The resulting effect was that they ceased to help one another. Attempts by most officers to take command, coercing them to cooperate in their common interest, were often thwarted by the communist guards, unless the officers were willing to be collaborators.

Some officers took up this choice, for example a Lt. Col Paul Liles and Harry Fleming chose this method by creating communist propaganda, and in return cutting down on the number of deaths in their camps. Even though these officers were later court martialed, many still believe they played a crucial role in saving many lives that would otherwise have been lost if they had not taken this stance. Elsewhere, many prisoners were too apathetic to defend their comrades and even themselves from the predators and other thugs like James Gallagher and PFC Roth well Floyd.

In one particular instance, that has stood out happened in 17 Feb 1951 when Sgt. Gallagher tossed two POWs that had been severely weakened by dysentery from inside the barrack to the cold where they froze to death. The reason given by him was that the body stench and the general stink of the unclean dysentery patients was a revolting one. Although this may be

accurate, when soldiers act as a team and care for one another, the survival rates is gotten very high.

There were some prisoners too who were never reported. The U. S authorities had documented about 66 American personnel that had been held back by the communist forces against their will after the war ended. A majority of them had been captured outside of Korea, and as such were not considered under the armistice terms. So far nothing ever came of them over after concerted efforts by diplomatic missions to secure their release.

There were about three general phases to the encounters of the POWs per most of the soldiers especially the ones who hired to tell their tale. For instance the soldiers who gave their personal accounts had the experience of marching which can be referred to as the " marching phase" in this phase the communist soldiers and particularly the Chinese subject the POWs to often walking barefoot while poorly clothed in bitterly cold weather.

They were then marched from their points of capture to camps that were situated deep inside North Korea. The second phase which took place until sometime in October 1951 when a majority of the camps were left to the Chinese control, In this phase where a great deal of deaths about 40 percent as a result of starvation, malnutrition as well as denial of Medicare by the unsympathetic north Korean PA guards.

Other than malnutrition, starvation and lack of medical care the experience of the soldiers also included such acts like night blindness. Most of the men interviewed have discussed night blindness among prisoners as well as guards, vegetable competing lacking from their diet or in small quantities

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that do not make up a balanced diet. These are enough conditions about torture lice cold together with dysentery. There are instance where a guard is told who was ready to offer his bag of lunch plus 2 hours head start to any prisoners of war was willing to escape from the prison camps. This is a testimony of the deplorable state of the prisons and the treatment offered to the soldiers.

Most of the times there was no medication and if it was provided then it was inadequate with no records at all. Some prisoners were indoctrinated on a daily basis with the sessions lasting from morning to night with just a short break for the Chinese soldiers to have their lunch. In the mean time the prisoners were not offered any food and it is during such times when the brains rushing process began. The perception that was instilled in them was that of repeating communist ideals and philosophy that they had learned in the process. At night the soldiers would come into the huts and make the soldiers sit while facing eth wall, and warmed with flash lights that shone on the prisoners' faces, the soldiers made them repeat the communist philosophy

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[2] Raymond B. Lech, 2000, Broken soldiers, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago IL, 330pp

[3] (Harry Spiller, 1998).

[4] (Harry Spiller, 1998).

[5] Harry Spiller, 1998. American POWs in Korea, sixteen personal accounts. McFarland & Company

[6] (Harry Spiller, 1998)