

ROUGH DRAFT by Louis L. King on Viet Nam Missionaries' Release

The altogether strange and contrary-to-international-law imprisonment of five C&MA missionaries and two Wycliffe Bible Translators and their five-year-old daughter at Banmethuot began for Rev. and Mrs. Norman Johnson on Monday, March 10, when North Vietnamese soldiers flushed them out of a dugout bunker at 4 p.m. and marched them westward on foot for five hours. Dr. and Mrs. Richard L. Phillips, Mrs. Betty Mitchell, and Mr. and Mrs. John Miller and little LuAnne, who had taken shelter in the USAID building, surrendered at 11:30 a.m., March 12. Taken with them were the USAID official, a Ford Foundation scholarship student, a visiting Australian who had been in Viet Nam but six days, and two Filipinos. They were driven in the Millers' Land Rover to a plantation on the outskirts of Banmethuot and detained until nightfall.

Under cover of night they were driven about 15 kilometers westward to a rendezvous camp where the assembled prisoners were separated for various destinations. By day they were compelled to sit in the open and not allowed to stand or walk. For ~~three~~^{SIX} nights they slept on the bare ground.

They were next moved to Ea Sup Camp (March 18), approximately 30 kilometers farther west, where they were kept for 33 days under utterly uncivilized, primitive, and bare survival conditions.

The one thousand prisoners at Ea Sup were issued striped purple uniforms, one towel, a plastic bowl but not chopsticks, a hammock to spread on the ground to sleep on, and one mosquito net for every two persons. There was but one latrine with three holes to accommodate the entire thousand prisoners. Later it was mercifully enlarged to 18 holes.

The diet was rice and salt water with a miniscule bit of meat added every other day. Some prisoners augmented their diet with leaves and wild figs. Soon everyone's body was bloated and distended.

They existed under thinly thatched lean-tos that were ineffectual in

keeping the daily rains from soaking them through and through. Almost from the start "the country sickness" or dysentery became chronic and took a fearful toll of body energy. There were serious respiratory illnesses. Mrs. Miller, with extreme lung congestion, came very near to dying. They slept on the ground with repeated and almost daily soakings until Easter Sunday when for the first time in their inhuman imprisonment they were moved to platforms to sleep on.

The next move was to Duc Co, approximately 60 kilometers west of Pleiku. They arrived at night in a dense forest 1 kilometer from their destination by truck. Disembarking they were led in impenetrable darkness through thorn bushes that tore at their clothes and hair. Underfoot were myriads of vicious ants that attacked and nipped at their feet. Their destination was a new and partially constructed camp consisting of bamboo platforms with thatched roofs--no siding, no partitions. Each platform contained just enough space for 100 men. No distinction, no separation, and no privacy was afforded the four missionary ladies in this camp that had been designed to hold captured South Vietnamese of the military officer rank. This so completely primitive condition was to last for 43 almost unbearable days. It was a veritable fight for survival which some of the missionary party almost lost. Some of the South Vietnamese military officers didn't make it.

Meals were twice a day; however, a portion of the rice from the evening serving was kept to make rice gruel for the next day's breakfast. Coffee was made by burning dry rice until black and then adding water. Their captors had not taken their money from them and permitted them to buy vegetable greens, red peppers, and bananas from tribespeople who occasionally visited the camp.

The dense jungle ever encroaching on their platform residences had to be conquered, and some platforms had to be finished. Rice and other provisions in heavy boxes had to be carried by the men from the road almost a mile away.

This necessitated a ~~daily~~^{daily} work schedule from 7:00 to 9:30 a.m. and from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Soon the entire party was stricken with malarial fever. Norman Johnson and little LuAnne came close to death. Norman's fever sent his temperature above 105°. He lost an estimated 45 pounds. The missionaries gave up hope for his survival. Still he lingered on so that on ~~April~~^{MAY} 14 the camp authorities had him carried out in a hammock suspended from a bamboo pole. With him went LuAnne. Mrs. Miller accompanied her daughter and Mrs. Johnson her husband but Mr. Miller was compelled to stay at Duc Co, ignorant of their whereabouts or what had happened to them until they were reunited on May 31.

Mercifully they were taken to a temporary hospital/dispensary at Thanh ~~Co~~^{CIAO} near Pleiku where they were nursed back to life.

Mrs. Betty Mitchel had had recurrent bouts with malaria. The day before being taken from Duc Co she collapsed two times. Her temperature was 104°.

On May 31, the day of departure, desperately ill and unable to walk, she was carried by six South Viet Nameese officers--fellow prisoners--through the jungle to the transport truck a mile away. They loved and appreciated her.

The sick and emaciated party was taken to Thanh Binh Camp near Pleiku where they were to remain for 76 days until August 15. Conditions here were somewhat better. The thirteen taken at Banmethuot lived together in one building with partitions reaching part way to the ceiling--their first privacy in three months.

At Thanh Binh there was no work assignment, and once a week one person, *under guard,* was allowed to go to the market to purchase additional food. They did have to attend Communist indoctrination classes.

Mrs. Phillips' enjoyment of the new situation was short-lived. A combination of fourteen days of unrelieved burning malarial fever, a severe eye infection, a carbuncle and boils necessitated a five-mile hammock trip to the Thanh ~~Co~~^{CIAO} *(CIAO)*

makeshift hospital where she remained for 46 days (June 28-August 13). Since she was the only woman patient, Dr. Phillips was allowed to be with her and personally to care for her. Two times every day for 40 days she received penicillin injected into her shoulders. With these and other injections she sustained 160 "shots" during her hospitalization.

On August 15, two days after Mrs. Phillips' return from the hospital, the party was trucked to Quinhon. For five days and for the first time the C&MA couples were separated. For the first time, too, they were actually locked up. One alleviating mercy was a considerably improved diet.

On August 20 the three-day truck ride to Son Tay Camp, 25 miles northwest of Hanoi, began. At all times the canvas flaps were tied down so they couldn't look out. Only under cover of night were they allowed out of the truck.

At Son Tay they were told they were "nonprisoners." For the next nine weeks they were under a kind of "house arrest." Each couple was given their own ample-sized room. Mrs. Mitchell had a private room near them. They were free to move about in the camp. Their only work was to pull the grass in the yard and to keep their rooms clean. They were provided good Vietnamese meals by the camp cook. The North Vietnamese officer in charge of them spoke impeccable English and was affable and kind. For the first time they had real tea and coffee, candy, bread, and cake. Their purple-striped prison clothes were taken away and replaced by three changes of civilian clothes. Twice they were taken on sight-seeing trips to Hanoi, departing camp at 6:00 a.m. and returning at 5:00 p.m. They visited art and cultural museums, ^{and} the Exhibition Hall; and they were allowed to purchase jewelry and handcrafts in the stores.

At Son Tay they were subjected to numerous and difficult interrogation sessions. These were very trying to them.

On October 28 they were informed for the first time they would be released on October 30 and flown to Bangkok and freedom and long-awaited and

prayed-for reunions.

On departure day they were up at 5:00 a.m. The camp cook and the official in charge of them accompanied them to the airport. Other officials awaited them at the airport. A farewell meal was served, speeches were made, and gifts were given to them.

Their flight arrived in Bangkok precisely at 4:00 p.m., Thursday, October 30, 1975.

Upon her arrival it was evident that Mrs. Mitchell had fever. It came and went until Saturday when she collapsed. Malaria and a serious depletion of minerals had taken her down again. Sunday^{NOK} she was taken to the hospital in an ambulance, and a regime was begun to rectify her eight long months of physical and nervous suffering.

At this time she is on the way to full recovery.