

Vietnam Prisoners of War Escapes and Attempts

By John N. Powers

In all the writings on the Vietnam War there does not seem to exist any one specific document listing the escapes and attempted escapes of American prisoners of war. That is the purpose of this document. It is not intended to be a detailed account of any specific escape or escapes. To find details of individual escapes use the sources listed in the bibliography.

This first listing is of attempted escapes, escapes that did not lead to rescue, escapes that ended in recapture. The list is undoubtedly neither complete nor completely accurate. Neither the government nor the military has extensive information on most POWs from any war. Especially missing from this list are the attempts of those individuals for whom no record exists, those individuals who escaped only to die from their wounds, beatings, executions, or the elements.

This list includes over 90 escape attempts, at least 20 of which took place in North Vietnam, 5 of them in Hanoi itself. There were American POWs who made multiple escape attempts.

No American POW escaped from North Vietnam and successfully reached friendly forces. American POWs did escape from camps in North Vietnam, some of them from camps in Hanoi. At least five escaped twice from camps in North Vietnam, some from established camps, others from guards while en-route to Hanoi. All of the men who escaped in North Vietnam were recaptured, usually, but not always, within the first day. One of them died from the torture which followed his recapture. One escape, which was planned to take place from the Hanoi Hilton, involved SR-71 Blackbirds flying overhead and Navy SEALs waiting at the mouth of the Red River. Senior Ranking Officers among the POWs canceled that attempt at the last minute.

In the European Theater of World War II less than 2% of American POWs successfully escaped and returned to US forces. In Vietnam more than 4% of American POWs successfully escaped and reached US forces. Factor in the completely foreign culture, language, and terrain and you begin to realize what this means. Those who tried deserve more recognition than they have ever been given.

Attempted Escapes

Samuel Adams: USAF Sgt, captured near Vung Tau 31 Oct 65 with Dusing, Moore, and Page, escaped two days later with Jasper Page (South Vietnam), never seen again after escape. MIA.

Cloden Adkins: civilian captured in Hue during 68 Tet, held at Runamuck I, Skid Row, then Rockpile. Escaped from Rockpile (North Vietnam) in 1 Oct 71 with Thompson and Meyer. Adkins recaptured same day, Thompson and Meyer recaptured after about a day. Released in 1973.

John Thomas Anderson: USA Sgt, captured 5 Feb 68 in Hue. Held in North Vietnam. Three escape attempts, on first one he got a mile from camp and passed out from wounds, the second time he walked into an enemy camp, and the third time he was captured and beaten by villagers. Released in 1973.

Gerasimo Arroyo-Baez: USA Sgt, captured 24 Mar 69 in South Vietnam with Richard Bowers when their base near Saigon was overrun, escaped day of capture, recaptured later that day. Died in captivity. NVA list death as 22 Aug 1972.

Edwin Atterbury: USAF Capt, shot down 12 Aug 67 over North Vietnam. Escaped 10 May 69 from Zoo (outskirts of Hanoi, North Vietnam) with John Dramesi, recaptured same day. Died 18 May 69 in captivity as result of beatings/torture after his recapture.

Harold Bennett: USA Sgt, captured 29 Dec 64 in South Vietnam. Attempted escape in Mar 65 with Donald Cook, immediately recaptured. Last seen by fellow POWs 28 May 65. VC announced his execution in Jun 65. MIA.

Richard Bowers: USA Capt, captured 24 Mar 69 in South Vietnam with Arroyo-Baez when their base near Saigon was overrun, escaped day of capture, recaptured later that day. Killed next day in his second escape attempt.

Ernie Brace: ex-Marine civilian pilot captured in Laos 21 May 65, escaped that night (Laos), immediately recaptured. Escaped 6 Jun 65 for a few hours(Laos), recaptured. Escaped 17 Apr 66 and evaded for four days(North Vietnam), recaptured. Escaped 17 Aug 66 (North Vietnam), immediately recaptured, buried up to his chin for seven days, eventually sent to Hanoi. Released in 1973.

Harvey Brande: USA SFC, captured 7 Feb 68 at Lang Vei SF camp, escaped 18 Feb 68 with Dennis Thompson and evaded for seven days (South Vietnam), recaptured, taken to North Vietnam. Released in 1973.

Norman Brookens: AID civilian captured in Saigon 4 Feb 68 with Utecht, moved to camp in Cambodia. Attempted escape 22 Apr 68 with Richard Utecht, James Rollins, and Australian Charles K. Hyland, immediately recaptured. Released in 1973.

Richard Burgess: USMC L/Cpl, captured 25 Sep 66 in northern I Corps, attempted escape in early 67 (South Vietnam), recaptured, escaped with Riate in Aug 67 (South Vietnam) by tunneling under a wall, evaded for two days, sent to North Vietnam. Released in 1973.

Jack Butcher: USAF 1st Lt, shot down over Laos 24 Mar 71. Held in Laos six weeks. Escaped, recaptured after a few hours. While being taken to Hanoi Butcher escaped again. The second escape was made known to US forces from intercepted radio messages in Laos from NVA units looking for him. US rescue efforts were massive, including direct involvement of the Secretary of Defense. Recaptured after 10 days on the run, Butcher was told he would be shot if he tried it again. Released in 1973.

Carl Dennis Chambers: USAF 1st Lt, shot down over North Vietnam 7 Aug 67 with Glen Wilson. They escaped while en-route to Hanoi, attempted to steal two small boats, recaptured after 12 hours. Released in 1973.

Arvin Chauncey: USN Lt Cmdr, shot down over North Vietnam 31 May 67, escaped second night, recaptured. Released in 1973.

George Coker: USN Lt JG, shot down over North Vietnam 27 Aug 66, escaped the night of 12 Oct 67 with McKnight from Dirty Bird (Hanoi, North Vietnam), floated/swam approx 15 miles down river before recapture next day. Released in 1973.

Donald Cook: USMC Capt, captured 31 Dec 64 in South Vietnam. Attempted escape in March 65 with Harold Bennett, immediately recaptured. Died in captivity Dec 67. Awarded Medal of Honor for resistance as a POW.

George Day: USAF Maj, shot down 26 Aug 67 north of DMZ, captured, escaped shortly after (North Vietnam), evaded for two weeks with a banged up leg and his right arm broken in three places. He had crossed the DMZ back into South Vietnam where he was shot as he was recaptured. Awarded Medal of Honor for escape and resistance as a POW. Released in 1973.

Eugene Debruin: civilian with Air America captured 5 Sep 63 in Laos when C-46 was shot down, escaped May 64 with others for four days (Laos), recaptured. Escaped 29 Jun 66 again (Laos) with Dengler and Martin. Debruin not seen after escape. MIA.

Joe Delong: USA Pvt, captured 18 May 67 in South Vietnam. Attempted escape from camp in Cambodia Nov 67 with Perricone and Sooter. Probably killed in attempt. MIA.

Dieter Dengler: USN Lt JG, shot down 1 Feb 66 in Laos, evaded one day, captured. Escaped mid Feb 66 (Laos), recaptured that same day. On 29 Jun 66 escaped with Debruin and Martin. Evaded three weeks, rescued by US forces 20 Jul 66.

John Dramesi: USAF Capt, shot down over North Vietnam 2 Apr 67, escaped (North Vietnam) 10 Apr 67 while being transported to Hanoi, evaded one day, escaped 10 May 69 from Zoo (outskirts of Hanoi, North Vietnam) with Edwin Atterbury, evaded 12 hours before recapture. Released in 1973.

William Eisenbraun: USA Capt, captured 5 Jul 65 in South Vietnam. Attempted escape with Russell Grissett in early fall 67. Died in captivity Sep 67, possibly as a result of beating for escape attempt.

Walter Ferguson Jr: USA PFC, captured 23 Aug 68 in South Vietnam, moved to camp in or near Cambodia. POWs held with him believe he was killed in an escape attempt in summer 1970.

Carroll Flora: USA E6, captured 21 Jul 67 in South Vietnam. Awarded Silver Star for escape while a POW. No further info found. Released from Hanoi in 1973.

George Fryett: USA Spec 4, captured 24 Dec 61 in Saigon, attempted escaped shortly after (South Vietnam), recaptured. Released 24 June 1962.

John Graf: USN Lt Cmdr, shot down 15 Nov 69 over South Vietnam. Pilot captured with Graf reported Graf attempted escaped in late Jan 1970. Believed to have been killed in that attempt. Listed as MIA.

Joseph Grainger: USAID civilian captured 8 Aug 64. Escaped 5 Jan 65, killed when being recaptured a week later.

Robert Greer: USMC PFC, captured 7 Jun 64 near Da Nang in South Vietnam, attempted escape shortly after with Schreckengost. Some reports say he was killed in escape attempt. MIA.

Edwin Russell Grissett: USMC LCpl, captured 22 Jan 66 in South Vietnam. Attempted escape, recaptured. Attempted second escape in early fall 67 with William Eisenbraun, recaptured. Died in captivity the day before Thanksgiving Nov 68.

Dennis Hammond: USMC Cpl, captured 8 Feb 68 with Joseph Zawtocky, escaped Apr 68 with Weatherman while at Kushner camp near Tam Ky (South Vietnam) by taking weapon from guard, shot in the leg by villagers and recaptured. Placed in stocks and beaten daily for two weeks (or two months-depending on the source). Died in captivity March 1970.

William Hardy: USA Capt, captured 29 Jun 1967 near Saigon. Awarded Silver Star for escape attempt during August 1967. Released in 1973.

David Harker: USA PFC, captured 8 Jan 68 in South Vietnam. Escaped shortly after capture, suffered knife wound in recapture. Released in 1973.

Douglas Hegdahl: USN E2, captured 6 Mar 67 in the South China Sea after being blown overboard from the USS Canberra. Attempted escape in Aug 68 (North Vietnam) while being used to film a version of his capture. Ordered to accept early release 4 Aug 69.

Charles Keith Hyland. Australian civilian captured 6 Feb 68. Escaped for a very brief period in February or March before being recaptured. This escape occurred in either South Vietnam or Cambodia. Attempted escape 22 Apr 68 with Richard Utecht, James Rollins, and Norman Brookens, immediately recaptured. Released on 26 Nov 68.

Charles Jackson: USAF Capt, shot down 24 Jun 72 over North Vietnam and captured, escaped, recaptured. Released in 1973.

Bobby Johnson: attempted escape in 1970 or 1971 while held in the Parrot's Beak area. May have been across the border in Cambodia at the time. Released in 1973.

Wilson Denver Key: USN Lt, shot down 17 Nov 67 near Hanoi. Escaped from back of truck and made it into the Red River, evaded for an hour before recapture. Released in 1973.

Arthur Krause: civilian captured 8 Jun 63. Reportedly escaped 23 June and evaded for two weeks. Recaptured, released 18 Nov 63.

James Latham: USAF Capt, shot down over southern North Vietnam 5 Oct 72. Escaped early Nov 72, recaptured after six hours. Released in 1973.

Don McPhail: USA E3, captured 8 Feb 69 twelve miles northwest of Pleiku. Two escape attempts while held in Cambodia. Released in 1973.

Duane Martin: USAF 1st Lt, helicopter shot down 20 Sep 65 on border of North Vietnam and Laos, evaded two weeks, captured. Escaped 29 Jun 66 with Dengler and Debruin (Laos). Evaded with Dengler two weeks. Killed by villagers as they evaded.

George McKnight: USAF Capt, shot down 6 Nov 65 over North Vietnam, escaped with Coker from Dirty Bird 12 Oct 67 (Hanoi, North Vietnam), got approx 15 miles down river, recaptured next day. Released in 1973.

Lewis Meyer: civilian captured 1 Feb 68 in Hue during Tet, escaped from Rockpile (North Vietnam) 1 Oct 71 with Thompson and Adkins, recaptured with Thompson after about a day. Released in 1973.

Thomas Moe: USAF 1st Lt, aircraft damaged from faulty bomb fuses, bailed out 16 Jan 68 over Laos. Evaded with pilot for three days. Escaped twice in first few days of capture, immediately recaptured. Released in 1973.

Walter H. Moon: USA Capt, captured 22 Apr 61 in Laos. Made two escape attempts which, along with his refusal to cooperate, led to his execution 22 Jul 1961.

Stanley Newell: USA E4, captured 12 Jul 67 near Pleiku. Escape attempt in South Vietnam. Released in 1973.

Michael O'Connor: USA Warrant officer, captured 4 Feb 68. Attempted escape before reaching Portholes in North Vietnam. Released in 1973.

Richard Perricone: USA PFC, captured 12 Jul 67 near Pleiku in South Vietnam. Attempted escape from camp in Cambodia Nov 67 with DeLong and Sooter, recaptured same day. Released in 1973.

Robert Phillips: USA Pvt, captured 23 Jun 70 in South Vietnam. Reportedly killed in escape attempt with Rozo, date unknown. MIA.

Dan Pitzer: USA Sgt, captured 29 Oct 63 in the Mekong Delta with Rowe and Versace. Attempted escape 23 Dec 64 with Rowe during an American raid on the area, quickly recaptured. Released 11 Nov 67.

Ben Purcell: USA Col, shot down over South Vietnam (helicopter) on 8 Feb 68, taken to North Vietnam. Escaped 7 Dec 69 from Skid Row (North Vietnam). Worked for three months to remove part of cell door. Headed into Hanoi, hitching a ride on the back of a bicycle. Recaptured next day. Escaped from Mountain Camp (North Vietnam) on 18 Mar 72, evaded just over a day, recaptured. Released in 1973.

James Michael Ray: USA PFC, captured 18 Mar 68 in South Vietnam. Awarded Silver Star for escape attempt in Jul 69. Credited with two escape attempts. Reportedly died in captivity 6 Nov 69. MIA.

King Rayford: USA PFC, captured 2 Jul 67 in South Vietnam. Escaped with Ray Ziegler on 18 Feb 68 (South Vietnam), recaptured next day. Released in 1973.

Alfonso Riate: USMC Corp, captured 26 Apr 67, escaped with Burgess in Aug 67 (South Vietnam), evaded for two days, recaptured. Released in 1973.

William Reeder: USA Capt, captured 9 May 72 in South Vietnam. Made escape attempt while being moved on foot from Cambodia to North Vietnam. Released in 1973.

James Rollins: civilian captured 4 or 5 Feb 68 near Saigon in South Vietnam, attempted escape from camp in Cambodia with Richard Utecht, Charles Hyland, and Norman Brookens on 22 Apr 68, immediately recaptured. Released in 1973.

James (Nick) Rowe: USA 1st Lt, captured 29 Oct 63 in Mekong Delta with Pitzer and Versace. Attempted escape 23 Dec 64 with Pitzer during an American raid on the area, quickly recaptured. Escaped late at night Oct 65 with Tadios, recaptured next morning. Early 68 Rowe simply walked away from his camp but walked into a regular VC camp. He convinced everyone he was lost while looking for firewood. Fall 68 he attempted to reach a main canal and flag down a plane. Was able to convince guards he was simply fishing. Successfully escaped 31 Dec 68.

James Rozo: USA Spec 4th, captured 23 Jun 70 in South Vietnam. Reportedly killed in escape attempt with Phillips, date unknown. MIA.

Fred Schreckengost: USMC PFC, captured 7 Jun 64 in South Vietnam, attempted escape shortly after with Greer. May have been killed in escape attempt or later may have been collaborator, part of Salt and Pepper team. Evidence is not clear either way. Remains identified 1991.

John Sexton: attempted escape with Springman in 1970 or 1971 while held in the Parrot's Beak area. May have been across the border in Cambodia at the time. Released in Oct 1971.

Charles Shelton: USAF Capt, shot down over Laos 29 Apr 65. Made at least three escape attempts in Laos. MIA.

Lance Sijan: USAF 1st Lt, shot down 9 Nov 67 in Laos, evaded capture after bail out for 46 days. Captured 26 Dec 67, escaped, immediately recaptured, died from his injuries in captivity 22 Jan 68. Awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions while a POW.

James Simpson: civilian captured 5 Nov 68 in South Vietnam with British civilian Thomas Cornthwaite. Both killed in escape attempt shortly after.

David Sooter: USA CWO 1, captured 17 Feb 67 in South Vietnam. Attempted escape from camp in Cambodia Nov 67 with Delong and Perricone, recaptured same day. Released in 1973.

Richard Springman: USA E4, captured 25 May 1970. Attempted escape with Sexton in 1970 or 1971 while being held in the Parrot's Beak area. May have been in Cambodia at the time. Released in 1973.

Len Tadios: USA Sgt, captured 11 Dec 64 in Mekong Delta, escaped Jun 65, recaptured after 3 days. Escaped late at night Oct 65 with Rowe, recaptured next morning. Died Mar 66 in captivity. (Called Davila in Rowe's book *Five Years to Freedom*.)

Dennis Thompson: USA SSgt, captured 7 Feb 68 when Lang Vei SF camp overrun. He made two escape attempts as he was moved to a temporary camp in Laos, severely beaten. Escaped 18 Feb 68 (Laos) with Brande, evaded 7 days, at times carrying Brande piggyback. Recaptured 25 Feb 68. Attempted escape again, recaptured immediately and beaten almost to death. Released in 1973.

Floyd (James) Thompson: USA Capt, captured 26 Mar 64 south of DMZ, moved to camp in Laos. Three escape attempts in first month of captivity, each time convincing guards who discovered him he was only leaving camp area to urinate. A fourth attempt was made in May or June. The fifth attempt was on 21 Jul 64, recaptured later that day. Escaped again 1 Oct 71 from Rockpile (North Vietnam) with Meyer and Adkins, recaptured after about a day with Meyer. Longest held American POW of Vietnam War. Released in 1973.

Richard Utecht: civilian captured in Saigon 4 Feb 68 with Brookens, moved to camp in Cambodia. Attempted escape 22 Apr 68 with Norman Brookens, Charles Hyland, and James Rollins, immediately recaptured. Released in 1973.

Thomas Van Putten: USA Cpl, captured 11 Feb 68 in South Vietnam. Made two attempts before his final successful escape March of 1969. He evaded for three weeks before being spotted by helicopters.

Humberto Versace: USA Capt, captured 29 Oct 63 in Mekong Delta with Pitzer and Rowe. Attempted escape late Nov 63, immediately recaptured. Medal of Honor citation lists 3 escape attempts. Other sources say there were five attempts. The VC/National Liberation Front announced he had been executed on 26 Sep 65. In 2002 he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions while a POW, even though the original recommendation had been submitted thirty three years prior.

Orien J Walker, Jr: USA Capt, captured 23 May 65 in Mekong Delta area. Escaped shortly capture, recaptured. Died in captivity Feb 66. (Called Tim Barker in Rowe's book *Five Years to Freedom*.)

Earl Weatherman: USA PFC, captured or defected 8 Nov 67 near Da Nang in South Vietnam. Escaped Apr 68 with Hammond from Kushner Camp near Tam Ky (South Vietnam), quickly recaptured, executed by villagers. Some fellow POWs had some doubts if death actually happened, considered Weatherman a collaborator. Others say he was killed by the villagers in the escape attempt. Not listed as a POW.

Glen Wilson: USAF Capt, shot down over North Vietnam 7 Aug 67 with Carl Dennis Chambers. They escaped while en-route to Hanoi, attempted to steal two small boats, recaptured after 12 hours. Released in 1973.

Roy Ziegler: USA CWO 1, captured 8 Feb 68 when helicopter shot down in South Vietnam. Escaped 18 Feb 68 (South Vietnam) with King Rayford, recaptured next day. Released in 1973.

Listing of successful POW escapes (reached US forces)

All escapes were in South Vietnam unless otherwise noted

Thirty-three American prisoners of war escaped and then reached U.S. forces. Of those thirty-three successful attempts, twenty-eight of them occurred within the first month of captivity. Only three successful escapes took place after the prisoners had been held more than a year, each of them in the South.

Donald R. Braswell, USA E4, was captured 23 Aug 1967 and escaped 24 Aug 1967 with civilian Dewey Holt.

Lee Brewer, USA E5, captured 7 Jan 1968 and escaped 8 Jan.

Issac Camacho, USA SFC, was captured west of Saigon on 24 Nov 1963 along with Claude McClure, Kenneth Roraback, and George Smith when the Hiep Hoa SF camp west of Saigon was overrun. On 12 Jul 1965 Camacho escaped during a night rainstorm and made it to US forces. The others helped cover his escape. Camacho was the first US military POW to escape.

Dieter Dengler, LtJG USN, was shot down 1 Feb 1966 over Laos while flying an A1H off the USS Ranger. He evaded until 2 Feb. On 29 Jun he escaped with other POWs. On 20 July he was able to signal US aircraft and was rescued.

Edward A. Dierling, USA E5, was captured in Hue 3 Feb 1968 and escaped 23 Feb 1968 with Hayhurst near the Laotian border.

Joe L. Dodd, civilian, was captured 8 Oct 1965. Successfully escaped 25 Oct.

James Dodson, USMC E3, was captured 6 May 1966 near Da Nang and escaped 17 Jun 1966 when he and Walter Eckes grabbed the guard's rifles while they were eating and escaped. They reached US forces four days after the escape.

Walter W. Eckes, USMC E3, was captured 10 May 1966 near Da Nang. On 17 Jun 1966 he and James Dodson grabbed the guards' rifles while they were eating and escaped. They reached US forces four days after the escape.

Jerry L. Fann, USA, captured 21 Mar 1967 and escaped 21 Mar 1967.

Bruce A. Graening, USA E3, captured 9 Mar 1967, escaped 18 Mar.

Kenneth R. Gregory, USA E6, captured 25 Aug 1968. He was found by a US helicopter on 26 May 1969 four days after his escape. He reported he had been scheduled for release if he signed a propaganda statement, but escaped the day before that was to happen. Listed in some sources as released.

Jerry L. Guffey, USA E4, captured 4 Mar 1969 and escaped 4 Mar.

Walter D. Hamilton, USMC Pvt, captured 18 Oct 1965 near Da Nang and escaped 29 October, along with Joseph North, Jr.

Paul G. Hatch, USA E3, captured 24 Aug 1969 and escaped 25 Aug.

Robert E. Hayhurst, USA E5, captured in Hue 1 Feb 1968 and escaped 23 Feb with Dierling near the Laotian border.

Dewey T. Holt, civilian or USA E4, was captured 23 Aug 1967 and escaped 24 Aug 1967 with Donald Braswell.

Frank C. Iodice, USMC Cpl, captured with Albert Potter 30 May 1968. Both escaped 1 June during an attack by ARVN forces.

Everett M. King Jr, USA E4, captured 1 Feb 1968 in Hue with Dierling and Hayhurst. Wounded, unable to walk, hid from his NVA captors in rubble on 8 Feb and managed to contact a US patrol on 9 Feb.

Charles Klusmann, USN Lt, Flying an RF8A from the USS Kitty Hawk, forced to bail out over Laos 6 Jun 1964. He and two Lao soldiers escaped the night of 30 August and reached friendly forces on 1 September.

Donald E. Martin, USA Spec 5, captured 2 Mar 1968 and escaped 15 Apr.

Steven D. Nelson, USMC Corp, captured 7 Jan 1968 with Michael Roha. Both escaped 21 Jan, reaching US forces the next day.

Joseph S. North, Jr, USMC Pvt, captured 18 Oct 1965 near Da Nang and escaped 29 October, along with Walter Hamilton.

Jasper Page, USAF SSgt, captured 31 Oct 1965 near Vung Tau. Escaped several nights later with Samuel Adams when they jumped their guards. Adams was killed. Page made it to US forces on 4 Nov.

Albert J. Potter, USMC Sgt, captured with Frank Iodice 30 May 1968. Both escaped 1 June during an attack by ARVN forces.

Richard F. Risner, USMC Maj, captured 20 Aug 1968 and escaped 22 Aug.

Michael R. Roha, USMC Pfc, captured 7 Jan 1968 with Steven Nelson. Both escaped 21 Jan, reaching US forces the next day.

James (Nick) Rowe, USA 1st Lt, captured 29 Oct 1963 in the Mekong Delta area. After four escape attempts he successfully escaped on 31 Dec 1968 while US forces were bombing the area. He managed to flag down a helicopter which almost fired upon him before they spotted his white skin and beard.

Linda Smith/Michelle L Smith, both civilians, were captured 10 Mar 1975 in South Vietnam and escaped 27 Mar.

William P. Taliaferro, USMC E4, captured 4 Feb 1968 and escaped 12 Feb. Also spelled Tallaferno. (He may have been released.)

William B. Taylor, USA Spec 5, captured 20 Mar 1968 when the O1D he was an observer in was shot down. On 6 May 1968 US helicopters attacked the camp he was held in without knowing he was there. Taylor had been severely injured in the crash of his plane. He was wounded again by the US attack. He crawled to a clearing and caught the attention of a US helicopter. When it came in he grabbed the skid but was shot off. The helicopter returned and the crew threw him aboard. He would not have been rescued if he had not first escaped on his own during the attack.

Thomas H. Van Putten, USA Cpl, captured 10 Feb 1968 and escaped 29 Mar 1969, evaded for three weeks before he was able to wave down a helicopter.

Buddy Wright, USA Sgt, captured 22 Sep 1968 while on a long-range reconnaissance patrol in Cambodia. Escaped and evaded for 10 days, finally reaching US forces 6 Oct.

Listing of successful POW rescues

There were only five Americans actually rescued from captivity during the entire war. One died shortly after rescue from wounds inflicted by his guards before they ran from the rescue forces. This was the only intended rescue. The others were unplanned rescues. One took place while the prisoner was being escorted from his point of capture to a prison camp. Another involved a helicopter assault in an area which turned out to hold prisoners. An American POW broke loose and ran to the helicopters.

Two American civilians were accidentally rescued when their captors ran into an American ambush. There were many attempts to rescue American POWs, the most well known being the attack on the camp at Son Tay in North Vietnam. There were at least 45 raids aimed specifically at rescuing American POWs. After the war there were cases where prisoners reported they had been within sight and sound of American rescue forces but were prevented by their guards from taking any action.

There were about five hundred South Vietnamese soldiers freed in these rescue attempts. Some American politicians and senior officers involved in the decision making for rescue efforts of American POWs hindered those efforts more than they helped.

Larry D. Aiken, USA E4, captured 13 May 1969. A Vietnamese reported seeing him in a VC hospital complex. A raid was carried out on 10 Jul 1969 to rescue Aiken. He was found outside the hut he had been seen in, suffering a fresh head wound. He was rescued but remained in a coma from the head wound until his death on 25 July. Aiken's recovery was the only "successful" planned rescue of an American POW during the entire war.

Roger D. Anderson, USA Pvt, captured 3 Jan 1968 about 65 miles south of Saigon. This may be the only planned rescue attempt that actually succeeded, even then it was accidental in the end. About five days after his capture an agent reported seeing Anderson being marched away from the area by a column of VC. Helicopter units were told to search towards Cambodia. On 12 Jan a helicopter pilot spotted a sampan with two men. When he buzzed them they gave him reason to open fire. One VC was killed. Anderson jumped up from the bottom of the sampan and took off his uniform shirt so they could see he was an American.

Henry Hudson, civilian, captured 21 Dec 1965. Later that same night an American unit ambushed the group as they were being marched through the jungle. Hudson, fellow civilian Edwin Jones, and their Vietnamese driver were rescued. Canadian Otto Shulten was killed by the guards.

Edwin Jones, civilian, captured 21 Dec 1965. Later that same night an American unit ambushed the group as they were being marched through the jungle. Jones, fellow civilian Henry Hudson, and their Vietnamese driver were rescued. Canadian Otto Shulten was killed by the guards.

William B. Taylor, USA Spec 5, captured 20 Mar 1968 when the O1D he was an observer in was shot down. On 6 May 1968 US helicopters attacked the camp he was held in without knowing he was there. Taylor had been severely injured in the crash of his plane. He was wounded again by the US attack. He crawled to a clearing and caught the attention of a US helicopter. When it came in he grabbed the skid but was shot off. The helicopter returned and the crew threw him aboard. He would not have been rescued if he had not first escaped on his own during the attack. He is listed on the escape list above.

Anomalies

Orville Frits: USA Sgt, captured 20 May 67 with Grammar, tortured and killed. Not listed as a POW.

William Grammar: USMC 1st Lt, captured 20 May 67 with Frits, tortured and killed. Not listed as a POW. Frits and Grammar were not killed in action. Their bodies showed obvious signs of torture prior to their deaths. They were prisoners of war when they died.

Frank Prendergast: USN Lt JG, shot down over North Vietnam 9 Mar 67, Prendergast landed off shore in the surf and was captured by two North Vietnamese soldiers. Prendergast shot one and exchanged shots with the other while the rescue helicopter approached. The rescue helicopter shot the soldier and picked up Prendergast. He is not listed as a POW.

Doyle Morgan USA, Leonard Sroveck USA, Ciro Salas USAF, Giacomo Appice USAF, and Jerry Schuller USAF, were captured near Da Nang on 14 Jun 1954 by the Viet Minh. They were apparently thought by the Viet Minh to have been French troops. They were held in a POW camp with French POWs and were released on 31 Aug 1954. They do not appear on some official listings of American POWs in Vietnam.

Charles Shelton and **David Hrdlicka** *may* very well have been rescued in Laos by a native team. Sources indicate this team then attempted to bring them out, acting as a Pathet Lao unit which had captured the two Americans. While doing so they encountered a North Vietnamese unit which reminded the “Pathet Lao” soldiers that all prisoners were to be turned over to the North Vietnamese. To protect both the POWs and the native team, and with the agreement of both Shelton and Hrdlicka, this was done. Further rescue attempts were impossible. Both remain MIA. Laos was a dark hole which swallowed many Americans.

An Air Force pilot captured on 20 Dec 67 took part in a one of a kind escape attempt. **Robert Craner** was shot down while flying as a Misty Fac over North Vietnam with **Guy Gruters** (who had been shot down on 8 Nov 67 and rescued at sea.) As rescue efforts took place on 21 Dec Craner began talking to pilots overhead saying he was captured but was in a dialogue with his captors about trading him for a gold reward. Authentication proved it was actually Craner. This discussion continued with rescue aircraft overhead as they marched Craner north, at times one of the North Vietnamese soldiers talking on the radio. Gold bars were actually obtained and in a helicopter off-shore the next morning. When radio contact was made in an effort to arrange a pick-up point one of the North Vietnamese stated Craner could be picked up in Hanoi and communication was cut off. Both Craner and Gruters were released in 1973.

American Women held as POWs

Evelyn Anderson was captured 27 Oct 1972 while working as a missionary near Savannakhet, Laos. Five days later she was burned alive in the hut she was held in. The two men captured with her with sent on to Hanoi and released there.

Beatrice Kosin was captured 27 Oct 1972 while working as a missionary near Savannakhet, Laos. Five days later she was burned alive in the hut she was held in. The two men captured with her with sent on to Hanoi and released there.

Ofelia Gaza was captured near Vung Tau in June of 1966 with her husband Vincente. He worked for Air America and may not have been an American citizen. Vincente Gaza died in December 1966 and his wife Ofelia was released the beginning of January 1967. Neither are on the DPMO listing.

Sandra Johnson was captured on 5 Feb 68 in Hue along with **Marjorie Nelson**. They were held at what was later called Camp Runamuck near Phu Bai. They were released on 31 Mar 68.

Dr. Marjorie Nelson was captured on 5 Feb 68 in Hue along with **Sandra Johnson**. They were held at what was later called Camp Runamuck near Phu Bai. They were released on 31 Mar 68.

Betty Ann Olsen, a nurse working at Ban Me Thout, Olsen was captured during Tet on 1 Feb 68. The group of POWs she was held with was moved constantly back and forth across the border into Cambodia. Olsen contracted malaria, beri beri, and dysentery. She died in captivity in Sep 68.

Elizabeth Pond, a journalist, was captured in Cambodia with Michael Morrow and Richard Dudman in May of 1970. All were released in June.

Linda Smith and **Michelle L. Smith**, both civilians, were captured 10 Mar 1975 in South Vietnam and escaped 27 Mar 75.

Eleanor Vietti was captured at the leprosarium at Bon Me Thout 30 May 62. She remains MIA. **Cathy Leroy and Michele Ray (France), and Kate Webb (Australia)** also spent time as prisoners and were released.

Bibliography

There are frequent differences in rank and dates in these sources. At times the rank used is that of the individual after the war, not at time of capture. Specific dates are sometimes hard to pin down. Detailed information on enlisted men is harder to find than information for officers.

Anton, Frank and Tommy Denton. Why Didn't You Get Me Out? Arlington, TX: Summit Publishing Group, 1997.

Howes, Craig. Voices of the Vietnam POWs. Oxford Univ Press, 1993.

Hubbell, John G. P.O.W. A Definitive History of the American Prisoner-of-War Experience in Vietnam, 1964-1973. New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1976.

Karnow, Stanley. Vietnam: A History. New York: Viking Press, 1983. Rochester, Stuart and Frederick

Kiley. Honor Bound, American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia 1961-1973. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998.

Rowe, James N. Five Years to Freedom. Ballantine Books. 1971

Veith, George J. Code-Name Bright Light, The Untold Story of U.S. POW Rescue Efforts During the War. New York: Dell Publishing, 1998.

Advocacy and Intelligence Index for Prisoners of War-Missing in Action

Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), Vietnam War missing personnel report.

Pownetwork.org/bios.htm