

Vietnam

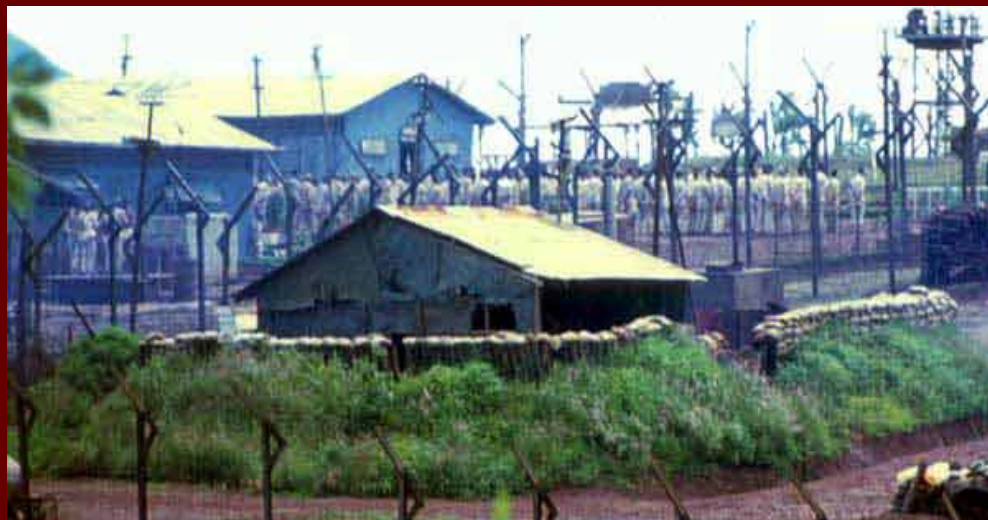
3rd SPS

Stool Pigeon II

Truth for an Orange

by **Paul Kaser**,
Biên Hòa 1969-1970

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While with the 3rd SPS, Biên Hòa, 1969-1970 I helped transport POW's to the big (but seldom seen by our guys) POW camp outside of Biên Hòa, where I observed interrogation (not torture) sessions. -- Paul Kaser

The Intel officer who took me to the big POW camp run by ARVN in the Biên Hòa area (see photo with previous story) told me he hoped to get the maximum information from prisoners without mistreating them. The local authorities could be very rough on the NVA/VC prisoners who had served in the forces that killed their friends and family members. We'd heard about the tiger cages and such. The captain wanted to get the prisoners first because he figured he could get more out of them with better treatment. He may have been right, depending on the individual and his situation. (Field interrogations, like those fictionalized in the films like Rules of Engagement, were, of course, conducted with a different urgency and intensity.)

One day we sat in on the interrogation of a talkative Northern peasant who claimed to have information on the capture of a couple of our fliers in the North. With his dusty purple pajamas and shaved head and pleading tone, he didn't seem much like the defiant, angry prisoners we had transported there in the past. How much of his story was true was questionable, of course, but the captain took careful notes on the translated responses. He recalled that one of the pilots wore a religious medal, that the NVA soldiers had protected them against angry peasants in the area, that one was white and one black, that they had bombed a bridge, but since they had failed to destroy it, were not killed outright by the locals. He recalled they had refused water from a local farmer but accepted tea when he boiled it. The prisoner identified himself as an NVA private who suffered from a concussion in a B-52 raid and was sent to the rear and into Cambodia to gather food for the troops. He had been out looking for food when the American/ARVN incursion took place. A local Cambodian farmer grabbed him and turned him over, he said, for a small sack of money. He was ashamed he had been sold for so small a fee.

As he rambled on, the questioners offered him oranges and cigarettes. At first he refused, probably fearing reprisals by other POW's, but then took what he could get. He seemed a lot more afraid of his fellow prisoners than of his ARVN/US interrogators.

As we exited through the concertina-wire gates and turned onto the dirt road back to Biên Hòa AB, the captain seemed amused. "Well, that was tough one. I thought he'd never shut up. His feeling were hurt because of how he was captured, but they'd have been more hurt if he'd known he hadn't been traded for a wad of 'p' at all but just for a bag of *plain old rice!*"

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