

POW remembers Vietnam, says Aggie training helped

By RUTH GRAVES
Battalion Reporter

Loyalty to fellow prisoners and knowing that friends were at home helped one Aggie prisoner of war endure more than six years, in a North Vietnamese POW camp.

Major James E. Ray, an Air Force pilot, told students in Rudder Auditorium Tuesday about his experiences as a POW. Ray was captured in May 1966 minutes after bailing out of his burning jet. He was held captive in North Vietnam until February 1973.

Ray said he and other POWs were tortured — "to break down our morale, to weaken us physically, mentally and spiritually." The prisoners were tortured so they would give information or write phony confessions, Ray said.

The prisoners were subjected to such tortures as solitary confinement, being tied to a stool for several days at a time, and being bound to a bed, exposed to mosquitoes. "The mosquitoes," Ray said, "like the North Vietnamese, showed no mercy."

The prisoners agreed among themselves not to give any information that would endanger men still in combat, he said.

They also agreed to undergo "significant levels of pain" so they wouldn't have to meet the demands of the Vietnamese. However, the prisoners would only resist until they were in danger of "going off the deep end" — unknowingly giving information because of intense pain and lack of sleep.

Ray said when the enemy subjected the POWs to unbearable torture, the prisoners adopted "another line of defense." He said the POWs often resorted to using a "cover story that sounded plausible without revealing anything that would be of tactical benefit to the enemy."

Ray once told his interrogators that he was new in his squadron, and only "played follow the leader." He said the Vietnamese believed him because their officers of similar rank and age were inferior to the American officers.

Ray said that once, after experiencing pain so intense that he lost even a simple train of thought, he agreed to write a phony confession. He said he felt guilty for some time, and didn't know whether his actions would keep him from returning home with honor.

Ray said he experienced a "turnaround" when he realized he was not alone.

"I knew my parents and friends were praying for me and concerned. I knew that people here at Texas A&M were concerned," Ray said he found out when he returned that many Aggies had defended him when they heard of his fake confession.

Ray said that instead of feeling sorry for himself, he decided to "make the best out of a bad situation." He and the other POWs taught each other courses in foreign languages and mathematics. They also made things that were very entertaining, very educational and very useful — from practically nothing.

One item the POWs made was dice from their bread.

The prisoners devised a communication code that they tapped on walls. They also swept and chopped wood in the rhythm of the code. Although communicating was a punishable offense, Ray said, the prisoners' code went unnoticed for more than three years.

Ray said that his training in the Corps of Cadets said he remembered being harassed by sophomores when he was a freshman, and remembered thinking that it was worthless, and that the upperclassmen were "off on an ego trip."

He said, however, "When we are in an academic situation like this, we do have to contrive situations that will put you under pressure, but it's not there just to put you down ... Those situations are designed to make you think under pressure."

Ray said he doesn't mind talking about his experiences as a POW because "I kind of enjoy it when it's my turn to talk to a captive audience."

Israel sends 'flower power' to U.S. for Valentine's rush

United Press International
TEL AVIV — Israel shipped more than 1.5 million flowers to American cupids during the weekend in a jumbo jet specially marked with a big red heart for St. Valentine's Day, an El Al spokesman said Monday.

It was the first time Agrexco, the agricultural export board, chartered an entire jumbo jet to ship flowers to the United States.

"We painted a big red heart on the nose of the plane because the flowers are for the St. Valentine's Day rush," the spokesman said.

The plane left Israel Friday and arrived in New York Saturday in time for the flowers to be sent to flower shops for today's holiday. The flowers included gladiolus, miniature carnations and roses, the spokesman said.

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Sing-a-grams sent to drivers, bowlers

United Press International
Detroit — Mike Fredrickson's Valentine season is occasionally bright with the perils of amorous diplomacy.

The Rhodes scholar and former English professor says one customer of his Sing-a-Gram service requested love songs be sent to two men.

"I hope the second one's his other," he said with a sheepish grin.

Other times, an order can hinge on the regularity of bus service.

A bevy of female bakery workers at a particular bus driver requested Fredrickson's melodic service to have a man board at a nearby stop and deliver the tunebook just as the bus cruised by the bakery.

Fredrickson, 34, whose Detroit branch of the Minneapolis-based service opened just in time for Valentine's Day, said business has been humming right along. The key to the service's popularity, he said, is the lasting effect of the message.

"After all, flowers wilt — a song lasts," the bearded musician said. The Detroit manager of the singing courier service, Mark Van Harren, 23, said he already has delivered some personalized song messages for customers afraid of forgetting the holiday or merely being to beat the rush.

Among the more unusual delivery requests for the music education graduate from Wayne State University was a bowling alley.

"It was from eight children to their mother. Everyone in the family was there, bowling in two lanes," Van Harren said. "And I'll tell you, it was harder than hell to hear it."

Van Harren and his two part-time aides have cleared their schedules to handle the gush of lovers' wishes they expect to face Wednesday.

The minstrels, guitars in hand and dressed in pinstripe shirts, arm garters and telegraphers' caps, plan to work day and night delivering musical compositions to Detroit recipients at \$15 a song over the phone or \$25 in person. Suburban deliveries cost extra, they said.

Fredrickson said the Valentine's Day wishes are "usually pretty straightforward."

Although the business is new, historians say the idea isn't.

Musical messages flourished during the time of medieval balladeers, but the contemporary history of singing telegrams started in 1933. That's when Walter Winchell asked Western Union to send a singing "Happy Birthday" telegram to singer Eddie Cantor.

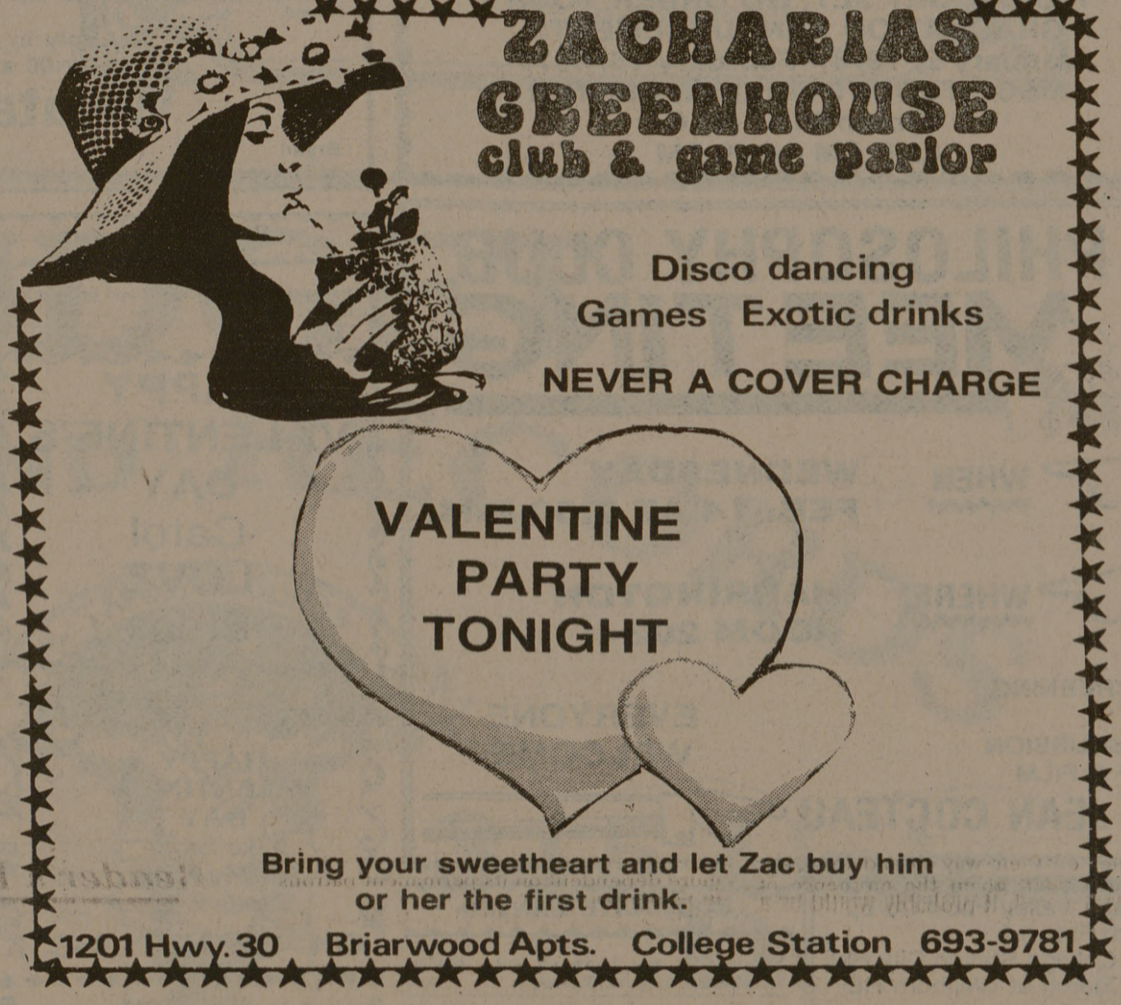
Fredrickson, who has operated the service in Minneapolis for 18 months, said he expanded to Detroit Feb. 1 because it was the largest market available without competition.

"It's the kind of gift that's oriented toward relationships," he said, explaining the appeal that sets the message apart from store-bought cards and other Valentines paraphernalia.

"People tell us pet things about the recipients and we write songs — it's personal."



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